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FROM THE EDITOR

WEED is the reason I was able to wiggle my way into *Penthouse* magazine. Last March, I wrote a feature for the Dope Issue called "Sex Pot: How Putting Weed in My Pussy Turned Me Into A New Breed of Cannabis Lover." My love of weed goes in and out, but my vagina is totally addicted to it. We're so "whatever" about pot here in California we don't even blink when someone sticks a cannabis suppository up their ass. (It helps with sciatica pain, duh.)

I like pot as much as the next guy who can't roll a joint, but I don't use it that often. I'm more fascinated by all its healing properties that have very little to do with getting stoned. It's kind of incredible what his ancient green plant can do to the human body.

I don't know if there's a God, but if there is, he created the top-shelf drugs: opium and cannabis. Does the smooth, relaxing high of dope even compare to the teeth-grinding, rat-poison chatter of some Mickey Mouse methamphetamines? I hope you don't know the answer to that.

I did a lot of drugs when I was young. I'm not proud of it, but I'm glad I got that out of my system. Now, I can stick to my wine and whiskey without wondering what it's like to try to touch my toes on ketamine. Taking your first drop of acid in your forties is like those women who who treat themselves to a "funky" butterfly tattoo on their 50th birthday.

Former First Lady Nancy Reagan did not want kids of the eighties to do drugs. Did "Just Say No" actually work, or was it a coincidence that between 1981 to 1991 the reported number of Americans who tried cocaine went from 1.3 million to 500,000? Did people actually stop with the blow, or did they just realize they should keep that habit to themselves?

Right now, America's issue is not cocaine, it's opioids. In 2012, opioid prescriptions were at a record high of 282 million. Opioid overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50. Some argue that cannabis, not Suboxone, is what will help wean people off. There's hope.

Without sounding too Tim Leary, I'll admit that cannabis may be the future. The fact that Big Pharma executives like former Purdue pharma CEO John Stewart are leaving pills for pot says something huge. After all, the U.S. government owns the patent to medical cannabis. Even they know it's worth something.



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FALL FROM GRACE

March Pet of the Month
Alexa Grace

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January 2018
Pet of the Month
Alex De La Flor

MAIL DOMINANCE

I was wondering what it's like to work for the wonderful and brilliant Kelly Holland. She's such a smart lady, starting out as a documentary filmmaker, then adult filmmaker, and now *Penthouse* owner!

—Adam, via email

[Ed: Is this a trap?]

I just got the latest issue and was pleasantly surprised. I was happy with the pictorials, loved the article on The Replacements and it was nice to see some bikes and cars, but the "from the editor" note was the best. I look forward to future issues. Keep it up!

—Bob G, via email

[Ed: We aim to please, Bob. It's oddly unsettling to know that people actually read that letter.]

I've been reading your magazine since 1969. I'm not your typical demographic but I loved the December issue, especially the articles by Dershowitz and Matt Gallagher. In fact, your articles by and large were great: Texas wind energy, counterfeiting money, war, politics, film, crime, and weed. I liked that you covered Ben Shapiro. He is a pretty sharp guy. I don't always agree with him but he will be a millennial mover and shaker.

—Frank, via email

[Ed: Thank you, pal. I'm proud of that issue considering I had to complete most of it from the back of a tour van.]

I'm only writing to tell you that I would be forever grateful if you were able to convince WTA tennis star Elina Svitolina to pose COMPLETELY NAKED in your magazine. Thank you very much.

—Frank L., via email

[Ed: I'll do you one better. How about Steffi Graf, Amanda Coetzer, and Elina Svitolina all together in one big, juicy lesbian orgy? Go big or go play golf, right?]

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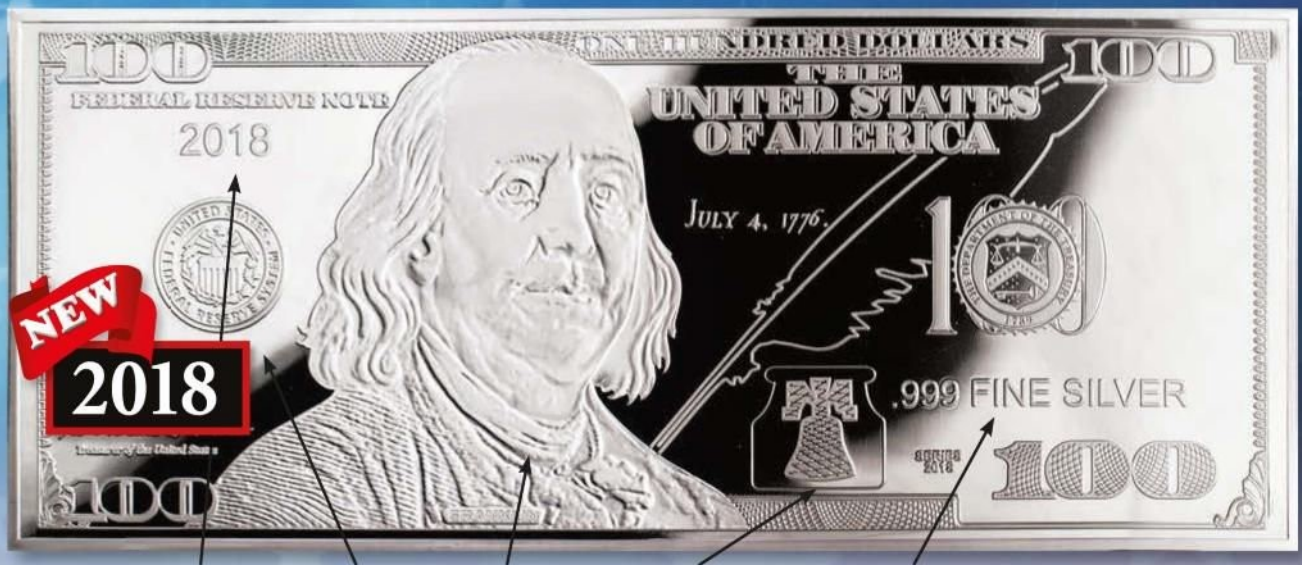
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

PUBLIC OBSESSION

MY wife Vanessa is obsessed with sucking my dick in public. There's no other way to describe it. Over the years, she's done it under the table at restaurants, in front of taxi drivers, in bathroom stalls, while I'm driving, in hotel pools, and even in elevators. I used to be surprised whenever it happened, but now I know when she gets that look in her eye that she's about to be up to no good—or very good, as the case may be.

For her, I think the appeal is the thrill of being caught mixed with the excitement of exhibitionism. She definitely also loves the humiliation of it. She once told me she likes being made to feel a little dirty and degraded. I'm happy to oblige.

Vanessa didn't try any of this on our early dates. She wasn't exactly a prude, but she seemed more reserved, waiting four dates before sleeping with me. The sex between us was great, but there was nothing particularly wild or kinky about it, so I was stunned when she revealed her secret obsession.

The first time we went to a movie together, I was surprised when, soon after the opening credits, I felt Vanessa's hand slide confidently over to my crotch. She continued to stare forward, but a tiny smirk played at the corner of her mouth as she rubbed her hand in circles. I was instantly hard.

We had been dating for about a month at that point, and I was already falling for her. The idea that this smart, sexy woman also had a wild streak seemed too good to be true.

When she unbuckled my belt and undid my pants, I thought she was about to give me a handjob. Her fingers were shockingly cold at first, as she wrapped them around my cock, but they quickly warmed as she rubbed me up and down.

She surprised me again when she slid out of her seat and onto her knees in front of me. There was one other guy at the far end of our row, but he didn't seem to notice anything. Still, anyone could have caught us at any moment.

Vanessa wrapped my jacket around her shoulders and pulled it over her head before taking my dick out. At a glance, it looked like I had a jacket draped over my lap. I shivered in anticipation, but oddly felt a little bad she was on her knees on what had to be a dirty, sticky floor.

I leaned down and whispered, "You're going to get filthy down there. Let's go out to my truck."

I felt her tongue slowly lick up and down my cock and it was all I could do not to groan out loud. Then she whispered back, "I belong on my knees on this dirty ground. I'm your filthy little whore." Then she swirled her tongue around the head before taking the whole thing deep into her throat.

Gone was the polite, classy attorney I'd been dating. Vanessa was now on her knees in a dark theater, sucking my dick like a pro, and judging from her audible moans, she was enjoying it as much as me.

At first, I was too worried about getting caught to fully enjoy it, but soon I didn't give a fuck who was looking. She had one hand wrapped around the base of my cock and was stroking with her fist as well as her mouth. When her free hand cupped my balls, I was in heaven.

It usually takes me a long time to come from getting head, but after a few minutes I knew I couldn't last much longer. A couple more strokes and I came in her mouth. I tried not to make any noise, but I was panting quietly in total awe of what was happening. I remember fantasizing about things like this as a teenager, but I never expected it to come true as a grown man.

Vanessa gulped and I thought she was finished, but she continued licking the length of me with her tongue as though she wanted to make sure she got every last drop. This was not a woman who was giving an obligatory blowjob, but a vixen who genuinely loved sucking dick.

She slid back into her seat, looking me in the eye and smirking slightly. She fixed her lipstick and sighed contentedly. It took me another year to propose, but that was the moment I knew I had to marry her.

She watched the movie for a few minutes before leaning over and whispering, "I've never been so turned-on in my life. I've soaked right through my panties. I need you to fuck me when we get back to my place later."

I inched my hand up her skirt to find she wasn't exaggerating. She was dripping



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I FLIPPED HER SKIRT ONTO HER BACK, REVEALING HER SMOOTH ASS AND PINK THONG.

wet and ready to be fucked.

I slid my fingers under the elastic of her panties and started to get hard again at the slick feel of her. I considered returning the favor and getting her off right there in the theater, but I wanted my dick to be deep inside her when she came.

"I can't wait that long," I whispered back, circling her clit with a wet fingertip.

Without another word, I took her hand, stood up, and led her out to my truck.

It was a good thing the back had a cover on it. We climbed into the bed, which gave us room and a little privacy—not that we really cared at this point.

She tried to lie on her back, but I guided her up onto all fours with my hands on her hips. I flipped her skirt onto her back, revealing her smooth ass and pink thong. Her panties were visibly soaked. I pulled them down to her knees, not bothering to take them off fully in the confined space. She arched her back in anticipation, rubbing her clit furiously.

I unbuckled my pants and pulled my dick out, amazed at how hard I was again so soon. I plunged into her in one hard stroke as we groaned together. She was unbelievably hot, tight, and soaking wet. Knowing that she was this aroused from sucking my dick had me close to coming again, but I knew I needed to hold out.

Thankfully, I didn't need to wait long. As I felt the first tightening contractions of her pussy, I surrendered control and came with her, savoring the feel of her squeezing around me.

We both laughed as reality sunk in and we realized we'd just left a movie to fuck in the parking lot. I felt like a kid again, reckless and wild. Vanessa still makes me feel like that now, years later. That was the first of countless times she's sucked me off in public. And I never know where she's going to try it next.

—Michael H., Dallas, Texas

CONTINUED ON PAGE 126

Seeing is believing. When you've had the encounter you've been hoping for, let us know about it! Send your letters to: *Penthouse* magazine, 8944 Mason Avenue, Chatsworth, CA 91311, or email us at letters@penthouse.com.



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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / VINICIUS TUPINAMBA

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GOOD GRIEF

FLESH-EATING CRABS, A GIANT SKY SCHLONG, MISSILE-SILO AIRBNB, AND OTHER ODDITIES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE.

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY PHOTOSYNC

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

SNIP, SNIP, SNIP!

A PIECE of human garbage from South Dakota was finally sentenced for his assault crimes! The specifics? During a fight with his pregnant girlfriend, 45-year-old Tony Ledbetter pushed the woman to the ground, held her down by the throat, and used a pair of scissors to cut her nipples off, permanently mutilating her.

Ledbetter pleaded guilty to three counts of aggravated assault, which prohibited prosecutors for asking the court for more than 30 years in jail. However, Judge Doug Hoffman thought three decades was child's play, and after the victim told the courtroom about her brutal emotional and physical injuries, he overruled the plea deal and sent Ledbetter to the slammer for 45 years. Swift justice!

On the other side of the world, a 26-year-old Argentinian woman named Brenda Barattini used a pair of garden shears to cut off a man's penis and testicles.

Barattini claims she let the local musician into her apartment where he sexually assaulted her, and that her Lorena Bobbitt-inspired chop was in self-defense. The penisless rocker, 40-year-old Sergio Fernandez, claims that he and Barattini had been dating for months and were in the midst of a sexual game where he was blindfolded when she attacked.

We'll see how it plays out in court, but if there is an Argentinian version of Judge Hoffman, Barattini is looking at a nice long sentence for her handiwork.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / JEROME SCHOLLER

PUNKED BY SCOTCH

FOR the first time in human history (we think), a sip of whisky made international headlines. A dude paid $10K for what he thought was a glass of rare Macallan Scotch from 1878. Turns out it was cheap-ass booze from the early seventies.

Thirty-seven-year-old Chinese writer Zhang Wei, who's made millions in part from online martial arts fantasy novels, was vacationing with his grandmother in ritzy St. Moritz, Switzerland, when the spirit moved him to splurge on the bogus Macallan. He was bellied up to the Devil's Place bar inside the swank Hotel Waldhaus where he and his granny were staying. This high-rollers' honeypot—home to 2,500 pricey bottles—might have the world's finest rare whisky collection.

The bottle that caught Wei's eye had been purchased 25 years earlier by the hotel manager's father. After Wei requested a glass, the manager called his dad seeking approval for the sale. The older gentleman decided it was time to open the bottle.

Naturally Wei had to post a photo of his decadent purchase on his website and social media feeds, followed by millions in China. Whisky experts caught wind of the post, checked out the photo, and frowned. The bottle looked a little fishy. They contacted the Devil's Place.

Before long, the hotel manager, anxious to protect the bar's reputation, hired researchers, including a team at Oxford University, to test the bottle and its contents. The results weren't good. The bottle, label, and cork were counterfeits. What bar management thought was a bottle of rare Macallan worth $350K turned to be "practically worthless."

The Waldhaus manager flew all the way to China to reimburse Wei. He was cool about it. He even said the fake Macallan tasted pretty decent. It all ended in kind of a lovefest.

Though reportedly, in Wei's next online novel, two kung fu masters fight to the death inside a fancy, mythical bar and bash the shit out of $3 million worth of historic liquor.

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / X F11PHOTO

JURASSIC CRABS

IN H. G. Wells's great sci-fi novel *The Time Machine*, the unnamed traveler jumps 30 million years into the future at one point. He discovers that the planet is dying, humans are long-gone, and nasty crab-like creatures scuttle over blood-red beaches seizing mutant butterflies. But in real life? We give you coconut crabs.

These fuckers are so scary you'd rather have a case of genital crabs than get nipped by their claws. The world's largest land invertebrate, they dominate a few small uninhabited islands in the Indian Ocean. Their giant pincers snap closed with nearly as much power as a lion's jaws, exerting 740 pounds of force. At least they don't swim very well. The notion of one of these things coming along while you're in the water is the stuff of nightmares.

When evolutionary theorist Charles Darwin was in this ocean on his research vessel, he heard stories of a "monstrous" arthropod, three feet long pincer to pincer, capable of shredding coconuts and grabbing birds out of trees. He gave credence to the coconut tale, but pooh-poohed the notion of a climbing crustacean.

Turns out it's legit.

American biologist Mark Laidre recently went to the archipelago. He described one of the islands as a "landscape of fear," empty of ground-nesting birds. He counted a thousand coconut crabs on his initial survey. He recorded a red-footed booby, roughly the size of a seagull, dead in one crab's burrow. And then it happened. While out observing at night, the biologist watched an adult coconut crab climb three feet into a tree, snap the wing bones of a sleeping booby, come after it on the ground, and deliver the death strike with a claw.

Laidre captured the attack on video. As he stood there recording, five more crabs showed up. The booby was dragged away in bloody pieces. And we have it on good authority Dr. Laidre lost his appetite for the rest of the week after his visit to the landscape of fear.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY FRANK PALI

COLD WAR CRIB

THIS hip rental is roomy as hell: 18,000 square feet, 15-foot ceilings. It's super-peaceful, too. In fact, it could be the quietest listing on Airbnb. The outside world might as well not exist. Renters will find oak floors, multiple bedrooms, comfy bathrooms, a fireplace. Décor-wise, the owners describe it as "bohemian-eclectic." Tapestries, natural fibers, and stained glass.

Negatives? Not much of a view. And if you like a breeze coming through the window on a nice day, you're out of luck. We'd also recommend claustrophobics sit this one out.

Why? Because Subterra Castle is a decommissioned missile silo and command bunker.

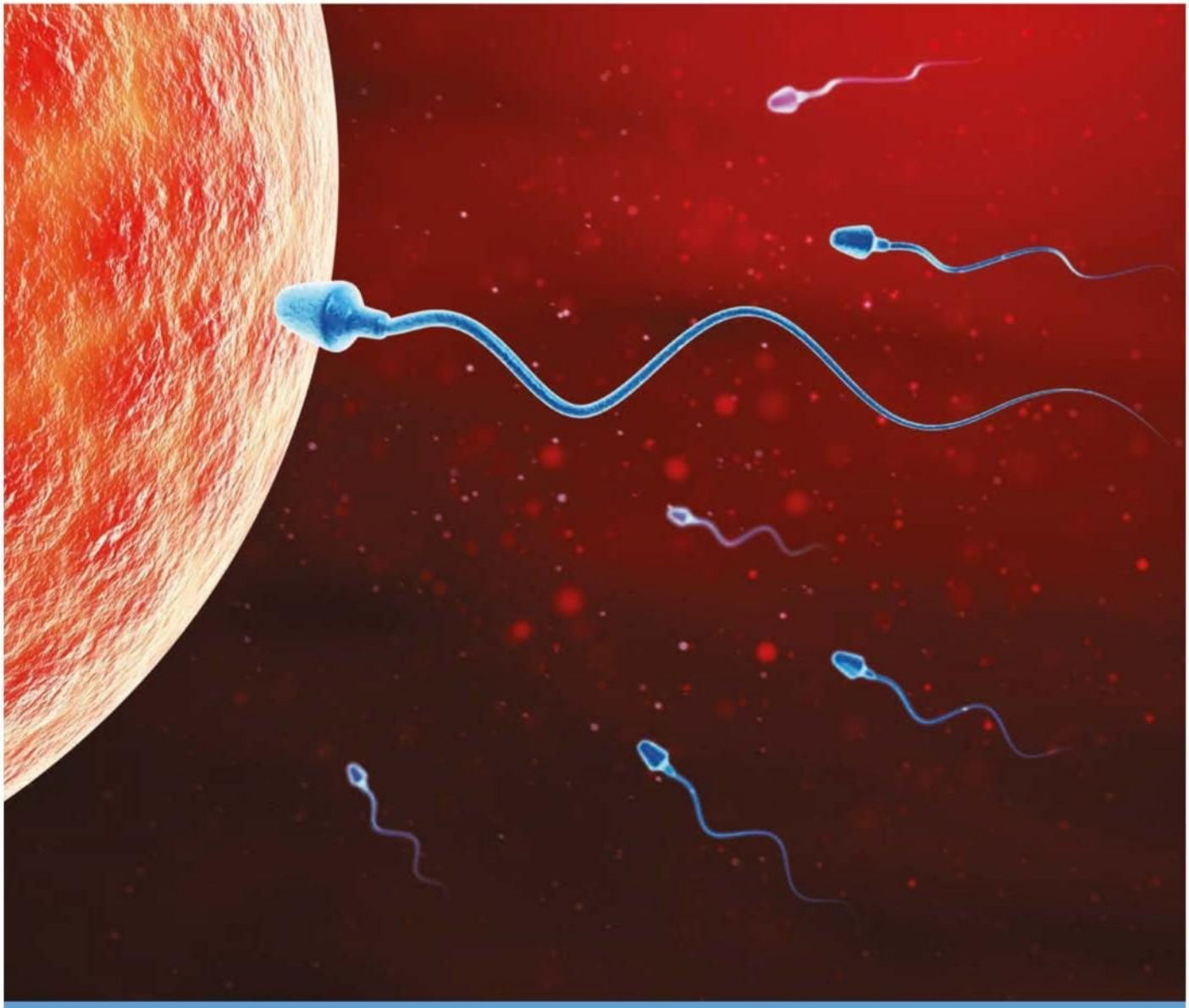
Its address is kind of a tell: 15513 Missile Base Road, Eskridge, Kansas. To get there you drive roughly 15 miles southwest of Topeka. The exotic habitats on Airbnb already included a Dutch windmill, a geodesic dome, an old gypsy wagon, and an Atlanta treehouse. But the onetime hideaway of a 78-foot missile equipped with a four-megaton warhead, a silo once staffed by anxious men during the Cuban Missile Crisis? Pretty freakin' unique.

Ed and Dianna Peden, self-described peaceniks and drum-circle enthusiasts, bought the fixer-upper for $40K in the early eighties. They went to town renovating, converting the Kennedy-era structure into a sprawling underground home.

And now you can book a night in this tubular joint. It's perfect for anyone feeling Nikita Khrushchev nostalgia. The 33-acre grounds include a pond and grass airstrip. And once you're underground, feel free to play Slayer as loud as you want. No one's ever lodged a noise complaint against Subterra Castle.

Our only beef? They should have called it Dr. Strangeloft.

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SHOOTING BLANKS

IN all our talk about the planet and its myriad problems, there's one subject that's conspicuously underrepresented in conversation: overpopulation. In short, there's too many goddamn people. Anyone with eyeballs can see it.

But we humans continue to reproduce, with the world's population increasing by more than 1.5 million per week. Yep—per *week*.

Perhaps Mother Nature is taking matters into her own hands with this one.

Last summer, an article in the journal *Human Reproduction Update* revealed that male sperm counts are plummeting in dozens of industrialized countries, decreasing by more than half over four decades.

Researchers analyzed data collected by 185 studies of 42,935 men who provided semen samples between 1973 and 2011 in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Over that period, they found a 52.4 percent decline in sperm concentration (how many millions of sperm are in a millimeter of semen) and a 59.3 percent decline in total sperm count.

No one knows what's causing the decline, but Shanna Swan, a reproductive epidemiologist at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, says it could be exposure to chemicals (like pesticides) while in the womb, which can harm male babies' reproductive systems. It could also be the increasing age of modern Western parents when they conceive. Obesity and stress affect fertility as well.

Another "noncontroversial" environmental factor, apropos of this month's issue and "known to influence sperm counts," is temperature change, says Dr. Harry Fisch, clinical professor of urology at Weill Cornell Medicine. "I think global warming…is responsible."

Despite falling sperm counts, male infertility has not become a widespread problem—yet. But watch out, fellas: Low sperm count is linked to premature death and serious health problems like testicular and prostate cancer.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / K_E_N

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY MS. OCTOPUS

HARSH TOKE

"NATIONWIDE is on your side."

If you watch any TV, you've probably seen retired NFL quarterback Peyton Manning riff on that jingle in the endless commercials he does as pitchman for the Ohio-based insurance company.

Except, holy crap, Nationwide was not one bit on the side of Audrey and Edward Cramer, ages 66 and 69, of tiny Buffalo Township, Pennsylvania, northeast of Pittsburgh.

Agent Jonathan Seamans, visiting the couple's property for a damage claim assessment, secretly photographed their backyard hibiscus plants, believing they were marijuana. Then, in one of the geekiest, narc-iest stunts in the annals of human lameness, this cop-wannabe actually sent the pics to police with a note accusing the Cramers of harvesting ganja.

Armed with a warrant, nearly a dozen police showed up at the couple's door, assault weapons at the ready. They pulled Audrey out of the house in her underwear and handcuffed her and her husband. They ignored her requests to put on more clothes. They made the couple wait for four hours in a squad car while officers ransacked the house for evidence. Clearly this was a crew that had watched *way* too many episodes of *Weeds*.

Ignoring the Cramers' insistence that the greenery was hibiscus, not doob, the cops confiscated the plants for testing. When the truth was revealed, the couple was released.

The bust was a bust. The couple never got an apology. And now they're suing, naming the police, their town, Nationwide, and tattletale Jonathan Seamans.

We think Ed and Audrey should take some of their wins and support weed advocate Jimmy Gould, who's fighting to legalize marijuana in neighboring Ohio, Nationwide's home state. Karma's a bitch, ain't it?

TOP GUN FUN

IN the Okanogan Highland region of northern Washington state, Christmas came early to a few lucky residents who happened to look up at the sky when a dexterous pilot created an enormous cock and balls with his plane's contrails.

The Navy airmen were in the middle of training exercises on November 16 when one of the EA-18G Growler pilots seized the opportunity to express his inner Basquiat.

While most normal people found the stunt hilarious, posting photos on social media, one angry and totally uncool woman contacted Spokane TV station KREM, wondering how she was going to explain the ethereal sky cock to her children, who were probably surfing porn in their rooms at the time.

The Navy also failed to see the humor in it, at least publicly.

"The American people rightfully expect that those who wear the Wings of Gold exhibit a level of maturity commensurate with the mission and aircraft with which they've been entrusted," Vice Admiral Mike Shoemaker said in a prepared statement.

The unit involved was the Electronic Attack Squadron 130 of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, and specializes in electronic warfare.

The pilot and his backseat aviator were facing some stiff (sorry) punishment. If the naughty skywriting was judged "sexual harassment" aimed at someone in the same squadron, the airmen could have been punished with "formal counseling, negative fitness reports that hurt careers, administrative punishment, or court-martial and separation from the service," the *Washington Post* reported.

But in the end, following their appearance before a disciplinary board, the aviators were placed on six-month probationary status and got to keep their wing insignia.

And the civilians who witnessed the aerial junk have memories to last a lifetime.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY THAIKRIT

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY MUSLIANSHAH MASRIE

WE ALL GO A LITTLE MAD SOMETIMES

GREAT news! Norman Bates is still alive—at least in the sleepy town of White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

Last October, police charged 60-year-old Robert James Kuefler with "interfering with a dead body or scene of a death," a year after it was discovered he'd been living with the corpses of his twin brother and mother.

Back in September of 2016, Kuefler's neighbors contacted police when they noticed the lawn was overgrown. After a forced entry, cops found the skeletal remains of 94-year-old Evelyn Kuefler in her bedroom, and the mummified corpse of her son Richard in the basement. Autopsies showed that both died of natural causes during the summer of 2015.

Robert, a maintenance worker, had been living with their decomposing bodies for over a year. According to the *Twin Cities Pioneer Press,* "the house was infested with maggots and flies and bodily fluids and a powerful stench."

"I was traumatized," he told the Associated Press. "What would you do?"

Um, for starters, have the bodies removed? Just a thought.

According to court documents, Kuefler found his brother dead in a chair. He eventually moved the body to a bathroom because it was "in the way." He told investigators he knew his mother was dying but didn't want to be around for it, so he left the house to drive around for a few hours. When he returned, she had crossed the rainbow bridge.

Kuefler then hid their deaths from family members, and sent out Christmas cards saying his brother and mother were in bad health and were not accepting visitors or phone calls.

"I am not some nut ball," he assured a reporter for the Associated Press. Kuefler was charged with a gross misdemeanor and advised to get psychological help. Which he insists he doesn't need, goddamnit.

Perhaps now he can rent out the spare bedrooms on Airbnb.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

BROOKLYN'S Prospect Park is like Central Park with hipsters. The same landscape architects designed both places, but the Brooklyn version, these days, is overrun with young women sporting emo-band tattoos and bearded dudes in skinny jeans with porkpie hats.

But the runaway bull who ended up grazing a Prospect Park ballfield last October? It was probably wasn't paying any attention to the body ink and facial hair on gawking bystanders.

The ten-month-old slaughterhouse escapee made a mad, Pamplona-style dash of two miles through the streets of Brooklyn, its date with hamburger destiny canceled.

"Just saw a COW bolting up 17th St in S. Slope. On the sidewalk. In case I thought there was nothing new to be seen after a lifetime in NYC," Brooklyn writer and bartender Rosie Schaap, sister to ESPN's Jeremy Schaap, tweeted as the sound of clattering hooves faded.

After reaching the park, the bull refueled on grass for a good two hours. Crowds grew, news vans raced to the scene, and the NYPD worked up a game plan. Eventually cops shot it with a tranquilizer, somehow loaded the 500-pounder into a police horse trailer, and Animal Care and Control took the resourceful bovine, which they nicknamed Jimmy K., for Kimmel, away.

It's been renamed Shankar ("one who brings about peace and prosperity") by the head of New Jersey's Skyland Animal Sanctuary, where our freedom lover will live out the rest of its days, eating hay, running around, and maybe even smelling flowers like gentle Ferdinand.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY NATALY STUDIO

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ALEXA, DON'T TELL THE COPS

IN November 2016, an Arkansas man named James Bates hosted a football game with a bunch of his buddies. They drank some beers, ate some greasy snacks, and the next morning one of them was found dead in the backyard hot tub. After the initial investigation, Bates was charged with the murder of Victor Collins.

While collecting evidence, police seized a bunch of electronic devices from the home, but focused their sights on Bates's Amazon Echo, that irritating voice-activated device designed to turn the stereo down because we can't be bothered to cross the room to press a button.

The Amazon Echo activates when it hears the command "Alexa." Or in this case, "Alexa, promise me you won't tell the cops there's a dead guy in the hot tub."

Police were hoping that Alexa had been awake during the murder and was taking notes within her data chips. Of course, the Arkansas police had to serve a search warrant to Amazon in order to get the information they needed from the tight-lipped device.

Amazon honored part of the request. According to court documents, the company provided "account holder information for James Bates and [his] purchase history."

However, they declined to share information from the server, issuing a statement about privacy stressing that, "Amazon will not release customer information without a valid and binding legal demand properly served on us. Amazon objects to overbroad or otherwise inappropriate demands as a matter of course."

But that wasn't the only smart device police used to get clues from the Bates home. They also claimed that changes in activity in Bates's smart water meter outside could detect a possible crime-scene cleanup.

Even though the law has yet to catch up to our technological advances, these strides in crime-scene investigation are bound to change criminal behavior. Furthermore, issues of privacy and data sharing are going to outshine the constant whining about net neutrality.

Newsflash, murderers: You're going to have to step up your game if you plan to outsmart the Internet of Things.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / FLOATING MAN IMAGE BY ALTOSVIC

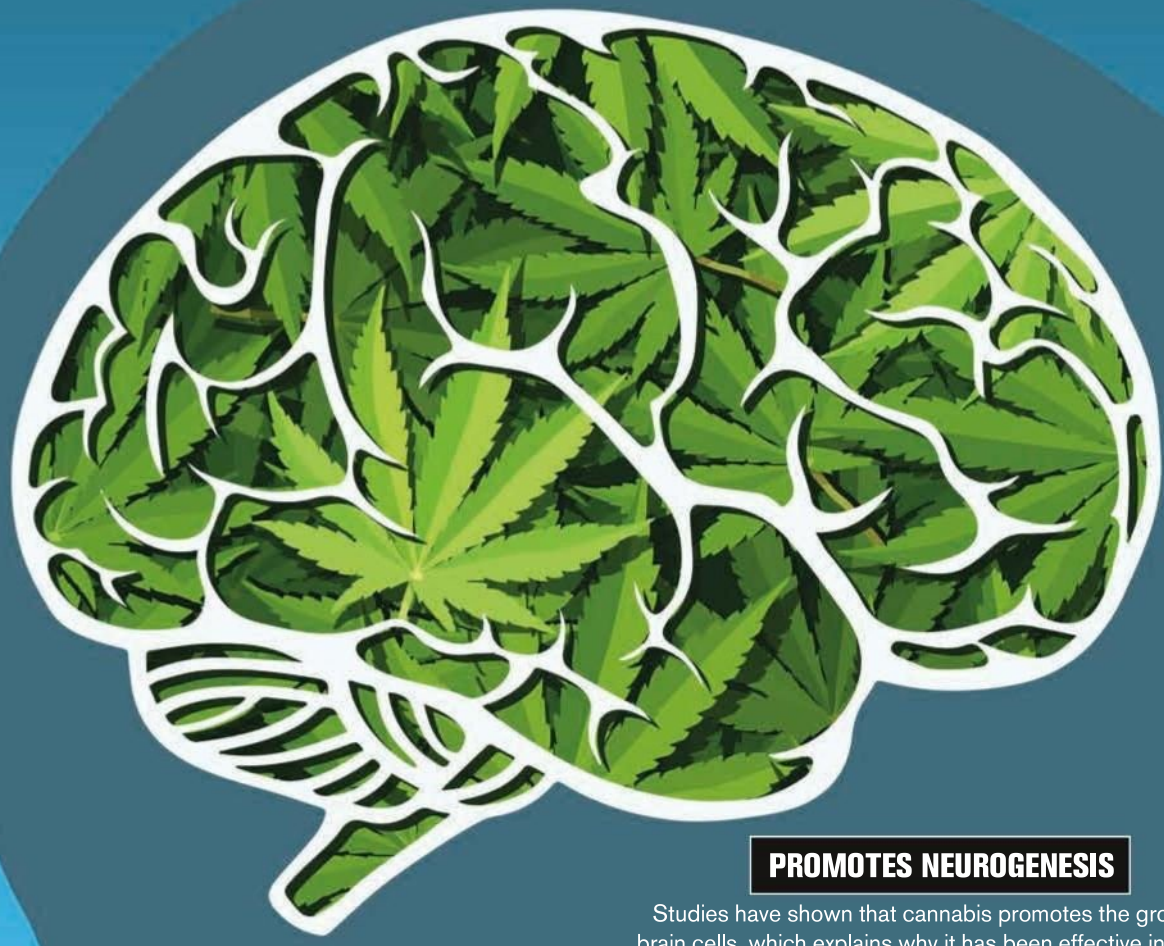
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WEED ON THE BRAIN

THE NEUROLOGICAL BENEFITS OF CANNABIS

There are two main cannabinoids in cannabis: delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). THC creates the psychedelic high we all associate with smoking pot, while CBD calms disordered thinking, anxiety, and can act as a pain reliever. Here are some of the health effects of the ancient plant once known as "locoweed."



FIGHTS NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES

Cannabis has been proven to counteract conditions like Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis. A 2006 study published in *Molecular Pharmaceutics* found that THC slows the formation of amyloid plaques, which kill brain cells and cause Alzheimer's. Another study published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that THC helps connect receptors in nerves and muscles, diminishing muscle spasms and pain.

HELPS CONTROL EPILEPTIC SEIZURES

A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics* proved that marijuana extract helped rid epileptic rats of seizures for ten hours. Researchers determined that THC controls seizures by binding the brain cells responsible for containing excitement and regulating relaxation.

PROMOTES NEUROGENESIS

Studies have shown that cannabis promotes the growth of brain cells, which explains why it has been effective in treating mood disorders like depression, anxiety, and stress–conditions caused by a lack of adult neurogenesis.

ONE-STOP SHOP FOR EUPHORIA

When THC hits your brain cells it causes them to release dopamine, the feel-good chemical that stimulates your brain with pleasure, like when you eat a delicious meal or have sex with a lovely lady. In moderation, dopamine is great, but just like opiates or amphetamines, these extreme hits can become addicting.

STOPS THE SPREAD OF CANCER

Researchers at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco discovered that CBD turns off a gene called Id-1, which makes cancer cells spread like wildfire. It's also known that cannabis helps reduce the pain and nausea caused by chemotherapy.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY FGC

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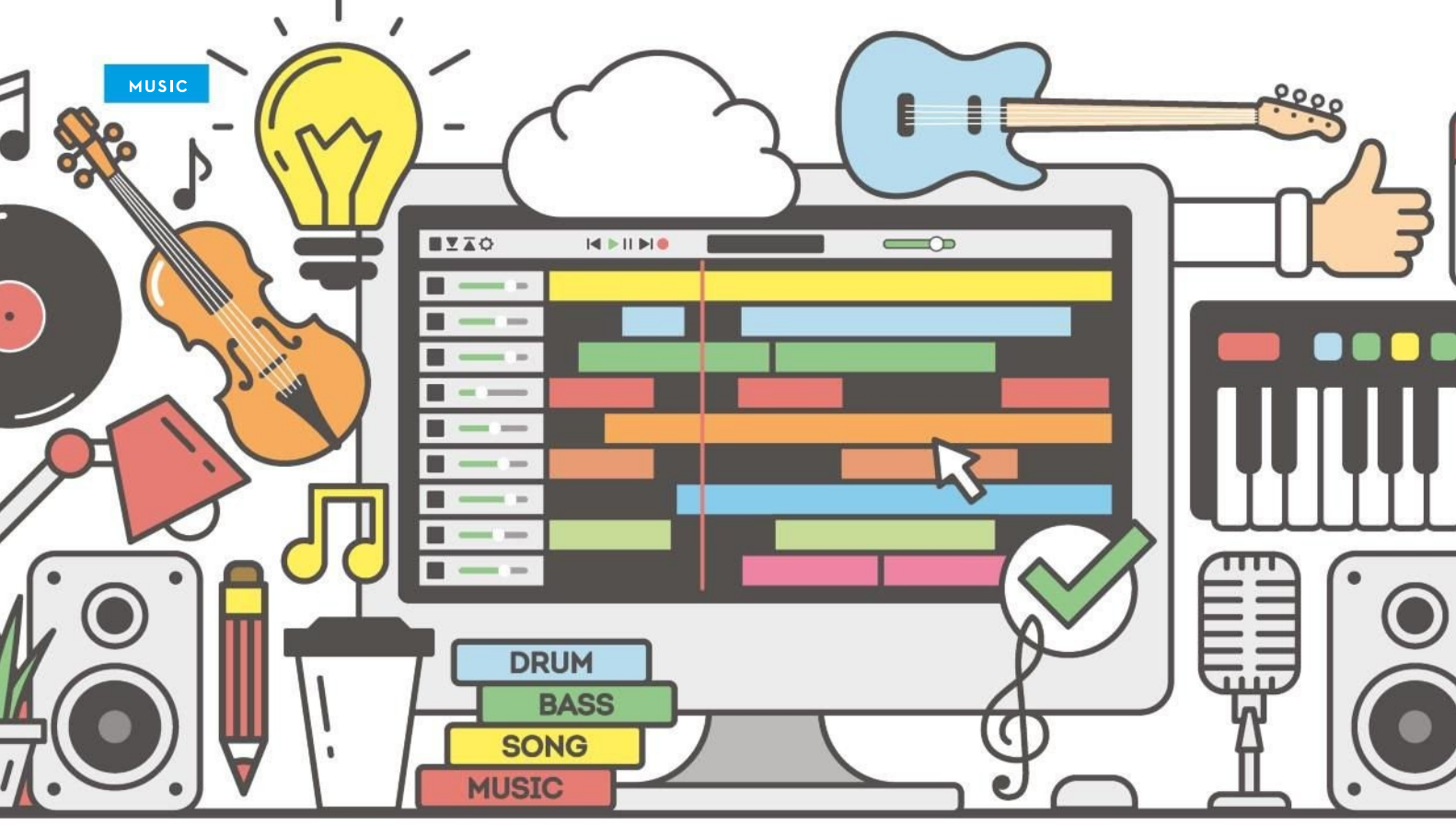
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TECH 'N' ROLL

THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE GROOVE.

BY CHRIS COLLINGWOOD

THE radical digital reimagining of nearly every aspect of modern life has been underway for a few decades now, proceeding at such a clip that we hardly stop to acknowledge the massive disruptions to our daily habits and tastes.

While MP3s changed the music industry for consumers, sweeping digital innovations were also changing the way music was made. And if technology and music have become irreversibly intertwined, it's because we tend to instinctively associate recorded music with the era it came from.

The 80s had giant goofy snare drums, the 90s machine-driven club music. The sound of the current moment is usually tied to the state of the current technology.

As often as people complain about the overuse of CGI in movies, it's also true that most successful digital rendering goes unnoticed. For every fake-looking space monster, there is a glorious, near-impossible sunset on an empty beach.

Similarly, some recording technology first appears as a gimmick—think Cher and T-Pain and Auto-Tune—but later becomes omnipresent. In fact, just about every record made now is Auto-Tuned, and though there was no exact moment when it started, these days you might only notice when it's missing. But other more insidious, creeping digital advances may be having a more profound effect, because they're far less obvious.

Specifically, I wonder if the very idea of playing with great feel will survive the digital era, since there is really no form of popular music that doesn't have every idiosyncrasy ironed out before it reaches your ears. While recording engineers correct a vocalist's pitch, they also line up every drum hit to an imaginary grid, sync every bass note to the drums, and make sure every instrument is the same (loud) volume. What would be the point of hiring a legendary session musician now? You could literally go to a studio and play each drum once, and one note on every instrument, and the engineer could do the rest, for half the money. And who gets credited for the performance?

While it's been clear for a while now that you can be a successful musician without knowing how to play anything but your laptop, the distinction between performance and program has only very recently become more or less irrelevant. There used to be great rhythm sections (musician-speak for bass and drums) known for playing in the "pocket" (musician-speak for that magical groove that depends on an unspoken understanding between two or more players). One of those rhythm sections—the legendary Muscle Shoals combo from Alabama—played on scores of R&B records and were sought out by everyone from Aretha Franklin to Paul Simon.

Surely there are similar groups working today. It's not that great players will cease to exist—it's just that pretty soon it won't matter at all. The market will dictate that.

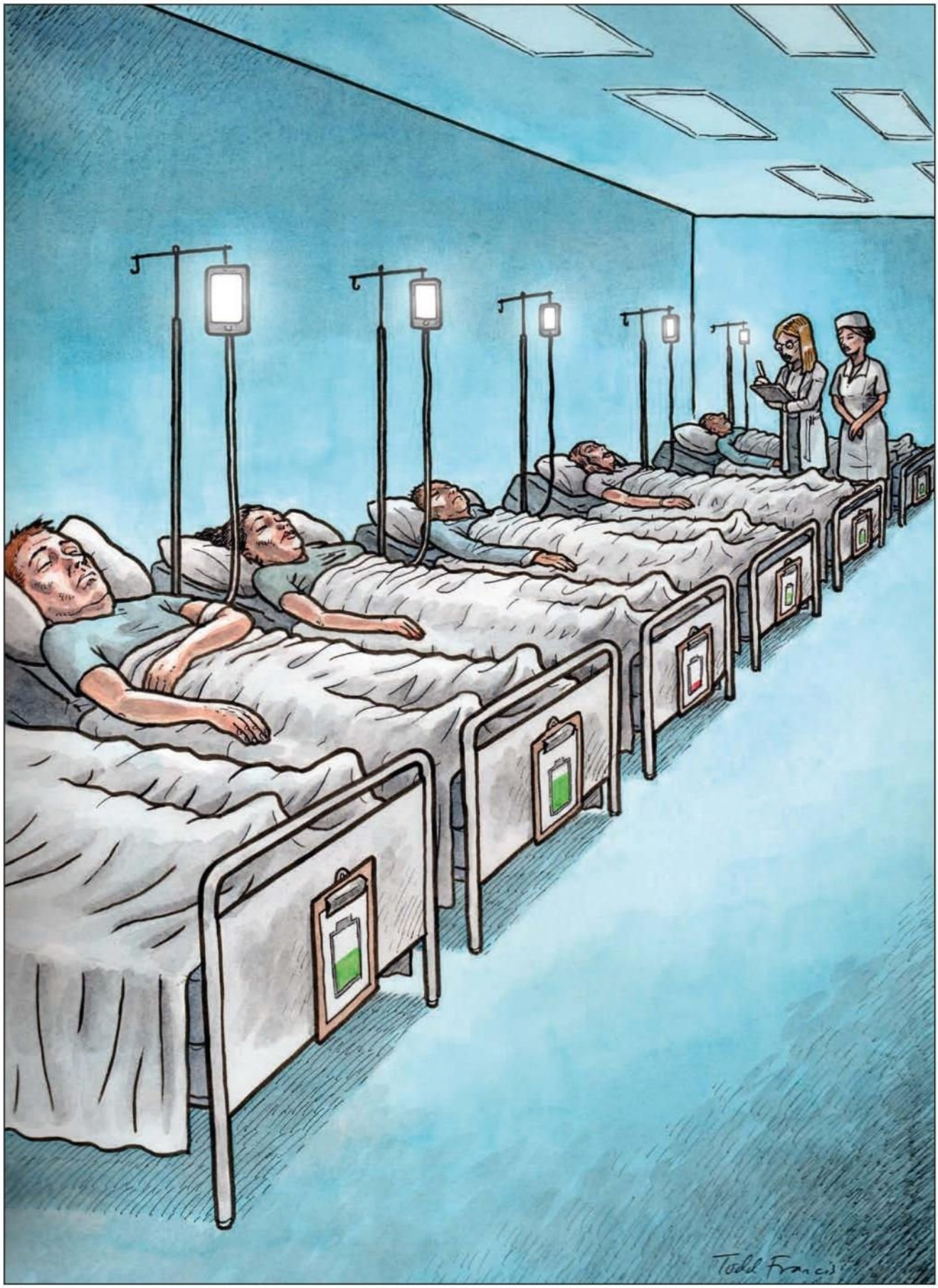
Auto-Tuning every performance ensures that the shittiest bass player sounds exactly like the greatest bass player. It's hard to imagine another rhythm section achieving the stature of the Muscle Shoals band, and people raised on digitally aligned music will never know what they've missed.

It'll be up to cranky old coots like me to remind them.

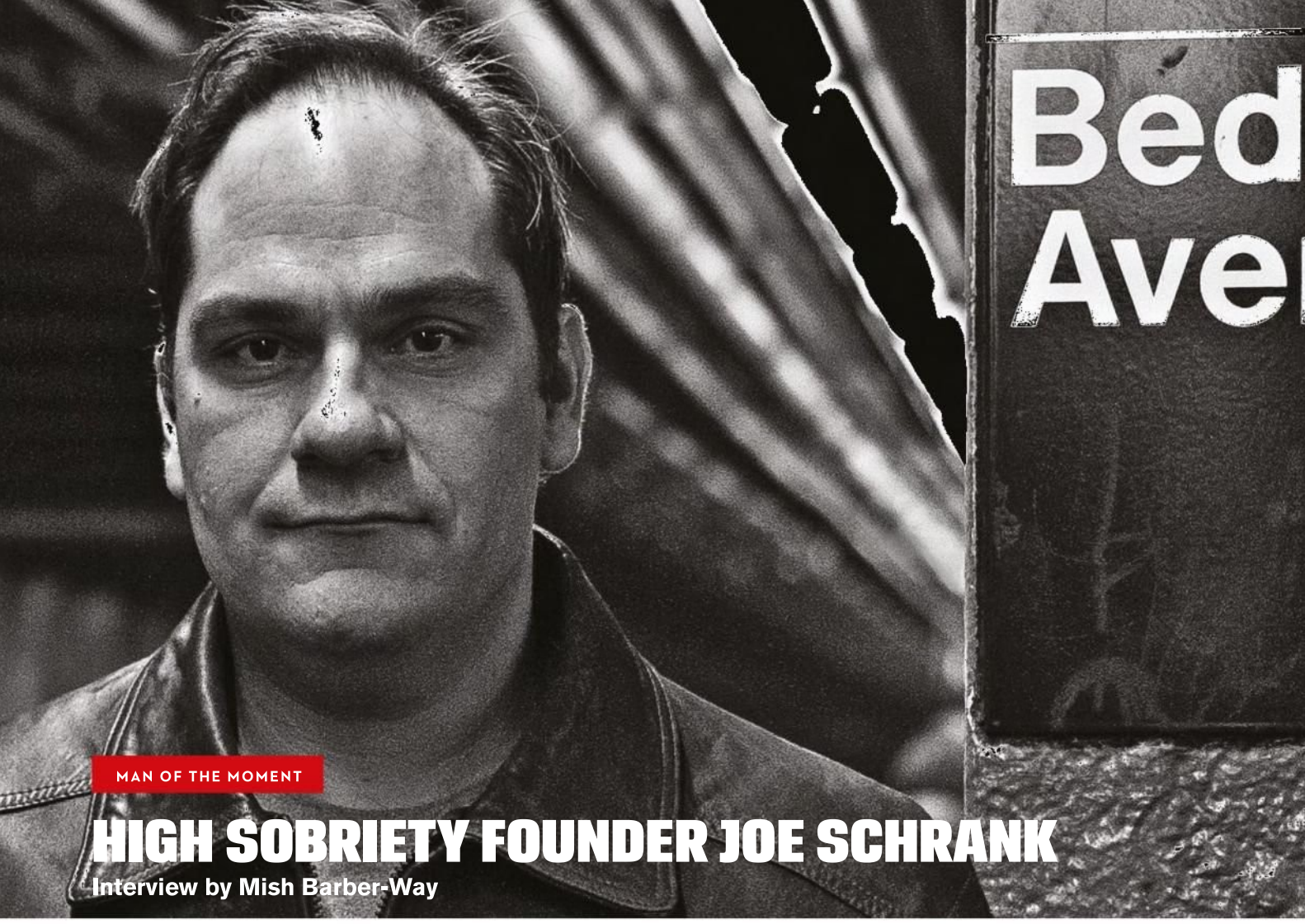
Chris Collingwood is a singer, songwriter, and cofounder of the rock group Fountains of Wayne. His new band, Look Park, released their eponymous debut in 2016. Follow him @lookpark

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / INSPIRING

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MAN OF THE MOMENT

HIGH SOBRIETY FOUNDER JOE SCHRANK

Interview by Mish Barber-Way

JOE Schrank has been sober for two decades, but he's not annoying about it. In fact, he may be the only social worker in California who supports the use of pot without ever smoking it himself. A tattooed, six-foot-five former USC football player, Schrank graduated with a master's degree in clinical social work from the University of Illinois, then got hired as a residential therapist at Promises, a Malibu detox center known for hosting addicted celebrities such as Charlie Sheen, Robert Downey Jr., and Lindsey Lohan. Later, Schrank moved to New York, founded the city's first sober living home, cofounded the addiction and recovery website The Fix, and worked with local authorities to establish the first recovery program in an area high school.

The focus of Schrank's graduate work was depression and substance abuse in college athletes, and here he drew on his own struggles. Son of an alcoholic Vietnam vet, Schrank turned to the bottle himself as a young man, "pouring alcohol on his depression," as he put it to me. He responded well to Alcoholics Anonymous, but watched others around him try AA and repeatedly fail to get sober. When a close friend of his overdosed and died a few years ago, it shook him into action. In 2017, Schrank founded High Sobriety in L.A.'s Culver City neighborhood, the first rehab facility to make cannabis a core element of its treatment plan for those addicted to alcohol and/or opiates.

We caught up with Schrank to talk about High Sobriety and why he thinks cannabis could be part of the answer to America's addiction problem.

What drove you to create an alternative to AA?

I think AA is a great organization for many people. I don't have an objection to it. I have an objection to the idea that it's the only solution to a drug-abuse issue. With 22 million people in need of some kind of chemical dependency treatment, labeling all people constitutionally incapable with a need to pray—it's just not logical. It doesn't address the problem. The recovery rates haven't moved. Think of dentistry and the vast improvements in the last 15 years. Why is it that chemical dependency treatment hasn't changed and, some might argue, is getting worse? If someone has a drug problem and the only thing they are told is, "You have to go to AA," that's wrong. There are other options like medication, or what I do at High Sobriety, which is harm reduction.

How does harm reduction guide the High Sobriety approach?

My vision of harm reduction is to create enough room for an individual to make decisions about their own life—to respect their right to self-determine without judgment. In other words, "You want to smoke pot? Okay. It's not my business." Some people give up cannabis and move to total abstinence, but you don't have the option to do that if you are dead. This is where I often get myself into trouble, but I don't believe that total abstinence is the best solution for everyone with drug-use issues.

For some people, no drug use as the only option for a problem is wrong. These young guys who have trauma—you kind of want them baked. They have a tendency for violence and other issues

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JOE SCHRANK

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that are helped by drug use. We all benefit from drug use—even if it's simply aspirin when you have a cold. The idea of a drug-free America is fantasy. Abstinence-only drug education is just as ineffective as abstinence-only sex education.

Why does weed have attraction as a rehab tool?
[I like cannabis] because there is no lethal dose. The truth of the matter is that if you look at the data analysis, fully-formed adults are pretty safe using cannabis. As a social worker, my interest is in the safety of the individual, the potential harm to self or others. Dangers reduce when people replace their drug use with only cannabis: sexual assault, violence between partners, emergency room visits from accidents, and so on. Do you want to give people a loaded gun or a nerf sword? I think they are safer with the nerf sword.

But some people don't like pot, or get paranoid smoking it. There's a reason they prefer Percocet.
At High Sobriety, we don't believe that everyone is a viable candidate for harm-reduction cannabis replacement. We don't have the magical solution to an addiction problem. What I learned about cannabis is that the strain matters and you need to consult with someone who knows their stuff, like a doctor. I don't know this stuff, which is why we have people on staff who do. The route of admission matters, whether it's an edible, a vape, or flower.

Weed also isn't what it was 40 years ago. It's strong as hell.
My initial idea was naïve—"No one dies from weed, so go smoke weed instead." Part of it was the enticement to get opioid addicts treatment. Many people are shocked to find out they can smoke weed in our rehab. I give them all the parameters: You have to see the doctor, the doctor has to qualify you, the pot must be dispensed from a reputable dispensary. It's not just a bunch of people sitting around smoking weed. For example, we had a kid in here with Crohn's disease. The doctor got him off opioids and onto a pretty low-THC strain of cannabis that helps the kid with his pain. Great. I believe he is better off using that pot than opioid painkillers.

We are still on a learning curve, but what I do know from years of doing this is that when someone leaves a sober-living facility, it's eyebrow raising. Be careful. Go to meetings. All this sort of stuff. We don't know what that person is going to do once they leave sober living. A portion of them return to active using and die. That's not the case if we have supported them into limiting their drug use to cannabis. A 22-year-old kid—and we get a lot of those—who is an injectable heroin user, then six months later is a medicinally dispensed cannabis user? Well, he may give up cannabis at age 25.

I can talk to a 22-year-old cannabis user about returning to school, military service, or their drama with their relationship, but you can't talk to a heroin user. It's very hard because all you ever talk about is for them to stop using heroin. I had one kid tell me that his girlfriend didn't like the weed-smoking. Well, do you like the girl or the weed more? Point being, when that kid [arrived] there was no girlfriend. All he had were a bunch of infected injection sites, smelled like a dead hooker, and was nodding off during conversations. Look, you can clean people up. I think people can have functional lives as cannabis users.

In AA, success is being substance-free and happy. What is success for High Sobriety patients?
Our metric of success is a bunch of different things: the ability to hold employment, civic responsibility, returning to school, disentangling from the legal system. Our metric of success is not a clean or dirty urine screen. That is a data point, but it doesn't tell you the whole story about somebody's life. We know that our [patients] will test positive for THC. If you look at a 30-panel urine screen and the only screen that is positive is THC—diazepam is negative, methamphetamines are negative, opiates are negative—I think that's awesome. AA and 99 percent of other rehabs out there would see that as a total failure.

At around $42,000 a month out of pocket, without insurance, the program's not exactly cheap.
With insurance, we can get out-of-pocket costs down to around $5,000. Look, as a socialist I hate the class system of drug use in America. I don't like that we only get the white kids from Brentwood and Connecticut. It's not that I don't like the white kids, it's that they are not the only people with [addiction] problems. I don't know how to diversify this issue besides winning the lottery. My proposed solution is taxing alcohol at an appropriate rate and designating that money toward treatment and recovery options for people. The state of California has not raised taxes on alcohol in 25 years. Really? Just do a quarter a six-pack. Who does that hurt?

Imagine the uproar that would cause. It's a pretty radical idea.
The recovery community is not organized as a voting constituency, right? As a guy who hasn't had a drink in 20 years, why do I have to pay for puke on Venice Boulevard and broken glass and all the mess that alcohol causes? The consumer should pay it. There should be a user tax for damage, just like there is a tax on your car for the environmental effect. The user pays. You don't like it? Don't drink it.

Why do you think addiction recovery hasn't advanced like other fields of medicine?
Think about it this way: We have a housewife from Brentwood in a bubble-gum pink track suit who takes pills and a kid with a skateboard and his jeans below his ass and we are telling them they require the exact same treatment for their addictions. Ten years ago, there was only ovarian cancer—now we have discovered subsets of ovarian cancer. We need to have subsets of addiction and addiction treatment if we are going to address our national problem. Culturally, we have never seen anything like the current opiate crisis, which means the solution isn't going to be like anything we've seen before either.

And cannabis could be part of that solution?
My thing as a social worker—and as a follower of Jesuit philosophy—is that people have the right to self-determine. We're there to serve them. I have an obligation, from an ethical perspective, to provide options for people. Some people go to AA and do really well. Not everyone does. Only five percent of people achieve total abstinence and do well with that. You want to join a system where you have a five percent success rate? Go ahead. You may be in that percentage.

High Sobriety is harm reduction, and harm reduction is all around us, whether it's a bike helmet, the airbag in your car, or a condom. I think that cannabis is harm reduction for addicts and can be successful. Think about it: 88,000 Americans drink themselves to death per year, while 1,800 college kids die from alcohol-related causes. No one smokes weed to death. All drug use has risk. Five hundred people a year overdose and die from Tylenol. I don't think that cannabis is blameless, holy, or without risk. However, I think the risk is mitigated. It's pretty low. I like your odds of getting through the evening after you've smoked a joint compared to drinking half a bottle of vodka.

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CRUSH

ALYCIA HEART

This 23-year-old babe is half Egyptian which might explain why we feel as though the River Nile is flooding every time we lay eyes on her. Alycia describes herself as seductive, naughty, and funny—sounds like a real downer.
@kissalyciaheart

Photography: Nick K

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FILM

WAKE-UP CALLS

BY SARAH WALKER

DOCUMENTARIES are some of the best, most efficient messengers for urgent environmental issues. We learn while watching, and hopefully, if the film does its job, we decide to act. Here are seven powerful films that have shocked us out of complacency.

FOOD, INC. **(2008)** The McDonald brothers launched their McEmpire in 1955, with a "uniformity, conformity, cheapness" business model that now applies to our entire food industry. The results? Animals live in horrific conditions, workers are mistreated, land is decimated, and corporations have a stranglehold on farmers, many of whom struggle to make a decent living. Robert Kenner's Oscar-nominated film takes a hard look at this dystopic world we've created, interviewing food experts like Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*) and Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*) to lay bare what we're eating, how it's made, who's pulling the strings, and what it's doing to us and the rest of the world.

TAPPED **(2009)** By 2030, two-thirds of the planet will lack access to clean water. Meanwhile, as Stephanie Soechtig's doc reveals, corporations like Coke, Pepsi, and Nestlé send tanker trucks into rural communities, help themselves to municipal water, bottle it in petroleum-based plastic, and sell it back to the public. Later on, those same bottles end up floating in water sources, get dumped in landfills, or wash out to enormous ocean "garbage patches" that are killing marine life. It's an insidious industry, selling us something we don't need, poisoning the environment, all to enrich corporate shareholders and oil companies.

DEATH ON A FACTORY FARM **(2009)** This brutal HBO exposé follows an undercover investigator to a factory farm in rural Ohio, following a complaint by an ex-employee. For six weeks, "Pete" works at the Wiles Hog Farm and secretly films the mistreatment of pigs, who spend their miserable lives in tiny pens, their piglets literally thrown into bins when it's time to wean, and where "junk" pigs (i.e., sick or injured animals) are killed by being hung from a chain on a forklift. It's a stomach-churning but necessary look at the grim reality of factory farming—a reality most people ignore because they "love meat."

GASLAND **(2010)** After receiving an offer to lease his Pennsylvania property for hydraulic fracturing, director Josh Fox began interviewing homeowners who'd accepted similar offers and soon regretted it: Not only could they light their tap water on fire, they now face serious health issues from the contamination of their land. Fox travels to fracking sites in Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas, documenting the unfolding environmental shitshow; he interviews scientists, politicians, and fossil-fuel execs, and attends a Congressional subcommittee discussing a bill to amend the exclusion of fracking from the Safe Drinking Water Act. Corporate lackeys may tout fracking as "clean energy," but thanks to the Oscar-nominated *Gasland* and its 2013 sequel, we now know better.

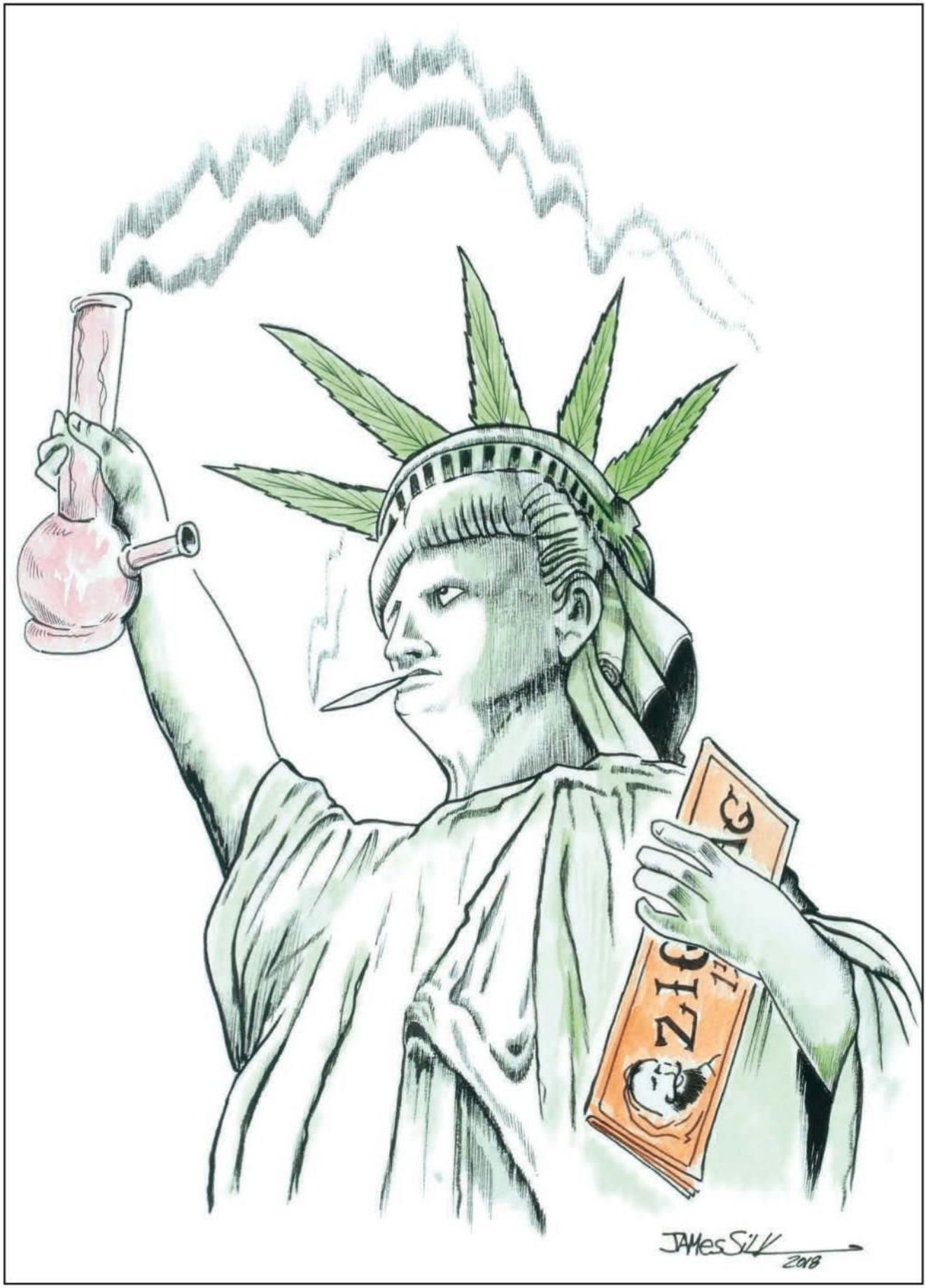
COWSPIRACY **(2014)** Forget fossil fuels for a second. According to recent U.N. reports, one hamburger requires 660 gallons of water to produce, and cows generate more greenhouse gas than all the world's vehicles combined. When director Kip Andersen begins to investigate why powerful environmental groups like Greenpeace and Sierra Club have yet to focus on the obvious ravages of agribusiness, no one will talk. Luckily he finds enough experts on his own to explain why the most profound thing we can do for the planet is give up our addiction to meat.

THE TRUE COST **(2015)** Andrew Morgan got inspired to make this film after the Bangladesh factory collapse in 2013, which killed more than 1,100 garment workers. He travels to 13 countries to investigate the human and environmental costs of "fast fashion," from sweatshop workers making $3 a day to a boss who must meet increasing demands of more for less; from cotton farmers in Texas who spray millions of acres with Roundup to developing countries like Haiti, where insane amounts of clothing donations clog landfills and put local clothiers out of business. A must-see for ravenous young consumers who need to understand those "bargains" are anything but.

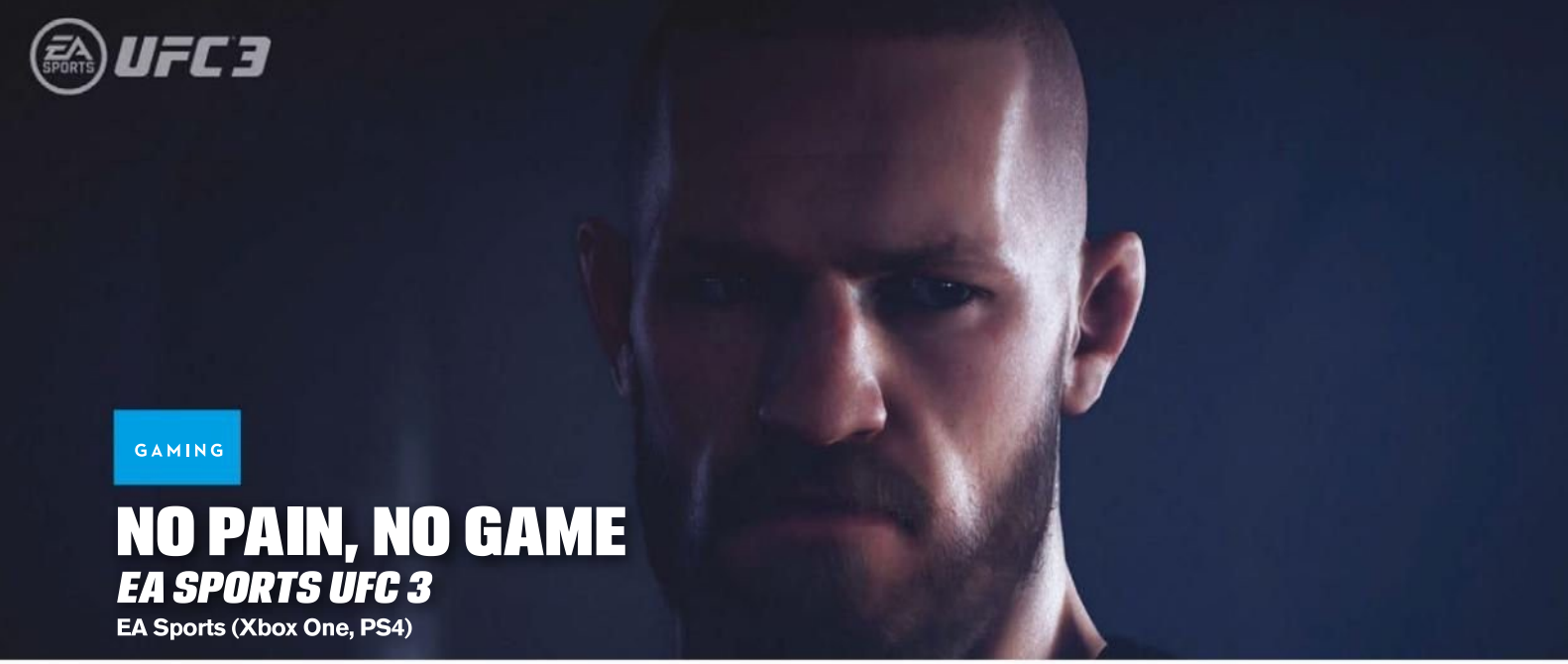
CHASING CORAL **(2017)** Following his Emmy-winning 2012 film *Chasing Ice*—about nature photographer James Balog, whose Extreme Ice Survey team used time-lapse photography to capture the rapid melting of our glaciers—director Jeff Orlowski goes underwater with a new team of researchers to document the phenomenon of coral bleaching. See it for the mindblowingly gorgeous images of living coral reefs in Australia, Hawaii, the Caribbean; take away the horror of their demise. And after slapping the shit out of anyone still on the fence about climate change, make them watch this film.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY 6TH.CREATOR

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GAMING

NO PAIN, NO GAME

EA SPORTS UFC 3

EA Sports (Xbox One, PS4)

DECAPITATIONS, flashy animations, she-warriors in thigh-highs—the sizzle that sells most classic fighting game franchises like *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* is missing from mixed martial arts games, which boil down to dudes grappling dudes. But EA Sports has a simple philosophy for adding oomph to its flagship MMA franchise: Put the *art* into martial arts. Instead of canned animations in *EA Sports UFC 3,* moves unfold more realistically and come with the risk of a sudden knockout. That means every roundhouse kick, submission hold, and counter move here might lead to chaos and contusions—the sort of high-stakes fisticuffs that make those UFC pay-per-view specials worth fifty buckaroos, despite all that dude-grappling.

And while *UFC 3* might lack the flash of arcade-friendly fighting games, it doesn't skimp on spectacle. Each move comes to bone-jarring life courtesy of a new animation and physics system that deforms the flesh of fighters in real time. Veins pop, skin darkens, and your movement slows as damage takes its toll and fatigue sets in. This abuse is more than just skin-deep; it affects each fighter's offensive abilities. Nor is the drama and trauma here confined to the Octagon. A new G.O.A.T. (Greatest of All Time) mode, borrowed from last year's *Madden* installment, lets players manage grudges between matches, building rivalries and hype for the next PPV event. Every licensed UFC fighter—from Ronda Rousey to cover champion Conor McGregor—is recreated with unmatched detail, right down to tattoos and identifying scars and marks. Knockout Mode from that last game returns for players seeking quick-hit visceral thrills, along with two new multiplayer games designed for fans of fast fights or submission holds. It all makes for a more gamer-friendly package that mixes combo-heavy style with the ready-for-pay-per-view grapples and strategy of mixed martial arts.

PEACE OUT: FOUR GAMES TO FIRE UP AT 4:20

> 4 <

JOURNEY

(SONY CEA, PS4, PS3)

Less a game and more of a digital Renaissance painting (or the gaming equivalent of a one-hitter for the chemically dependent), *Journey* drops players into a gorgeously rendered world and lets them unravel its mysteries with fellow online day trippers.

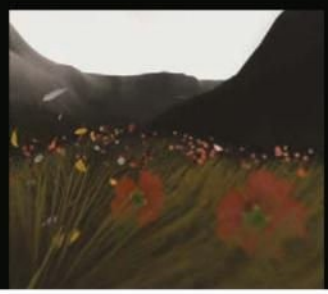


> 3 <

FLOWER

(THATGAMECOMPANY, PS4, PS3, PS VITA)

The hero of this acclaimed experimental game isn't an armored space marine or a superspy gone rogue—it's a stiff breeze. You control the wind to gently blow a swarm of flower petals that pollinate the world in this hippy-dippy, extra-crunchy art-house masterwork.



> 2 <

AMAZING KATAMARI DAMACY

(MOJANG, XBOX ONE, PS4, VITA)

The endearingly oddball, exceedingly Japanese *Katamari* series is gaming's equivalent of the munchies: Players enter an altered state where everything—from cows to cruise ships—is consumable and collectible into an ever-expanding junk ball.



> 1 <

MINECRAFT

(MOJANG, XBOX ONE, PS4, VITA)

Explore a limitless land, build elaborate castles, battle monsters that want to smash those castles, and even recreate the realm from *Game of Thrones* in pixel form. Or just make a castle shaped like a dong. *Minecraft*'s gameplay famously scales to your impulses and ambitions.



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THE MOBRO 4000

THE LONG ISLAND GARBAGE BARGE NO ONE WANTED.

BY MICHAEL HINGSTON

GOING green takes time. As recently as 1985, for instance, Americans only recycled about 10 percent of their garbage. It was a bad scene. Even worse, the number of landfills in the country was rapidly shrinking, as old dumps closed and not enough new ones were being set up to replace them. A crisis, it seemed, was imminent. And that posed unique (and uniquely gross) problems for those areas of the country running out of places at which to unload their trash.

Enter the Mobro 4000.

The Mobro was a barge, brought in to carry tons of trash from the Long Island town of Islip, whose landfill was nearly full, and float it down the coast to comparatively roomier dumps in the South. The idea was a pilot project, dreamed up by Alabama businessman Lowell Harrison, meant to benefit both sides: Islip would get rid of six million pounds of garbage in one fell swoop, while the Southern dumps would get cash, as well as an early experiment in renewable energy, by generating electricity from the methane gas produced as the trash decomposed.

Harrison got the owner of the only dock in New York City licensed to ship garbage involved, and together they secured investors, like the mob boss Salvatore Avellino. All appeared to be well. The Mobro 4000 left port on March 22, 1987, pulled by the tugboat *Break of Dawn,* and headed south.

But by the time the barge pulled into Morehead City, North Carolina, on April 1, there was a problem. A local TV crew had drawn the public's attention to the matter, and suddenly the battle lines of City vs. Country were redrawn.

"No one said 'a bargeload of waste,'" Harrison later said of the media coverage. "It was 'a bargeload of *New York* waste'!" Then a government official spotted a bedpan amidst the trash, which led to fears that there might be other, more hazardous hospital waste onboard.

At this point, word of a homeless, floating mound of garbage went national. Nightly newscasts across America were suddenly full of images of the Mobro as it tried its luck up and down the East Coast, with vivid descriptions of its cargo "dripping brown ooze" as it sat onboard, rotting and fully exposed to the elements. After Louisiana, the barge tried its luck across the Gulf in Mexico, and then further south in Belize. For a time it sat anchored a few miles off the coast of Key West, Florida. But nobody wanted it.

In May, the Mobro returned to New York. But a pair of court orders once again blocked it from being unloaded. Even back in the trash pile's home state, it was a quagmire that no politician wanted to be associated with. Finally, more than five months after first leaving port, a judge ruled that the Mobro's trash was to be burned in a Brooklyn incinerator—where it was found to contain (surprise!) mostly scrap paper—and then returned to the very same place it originated from: Islip, Long Island.

At the time, the odyssey of the Mobro was seen as a face-slappingly obvious symbol of the garbage crisis facing America in the 1980s. It was also used as a rallying cry for the burgeoning environmentalist movement; at one point Greenpeace activists hung a banner off the side of the trash that read "Next time…try recycling." And it seemed to work, too. Remember that dismal national recycling rate of 10 percent in 1985? It jumped to 16 percent in 1990, and then to 25.7 percent in 1995, thanks in part to awareness created by stories like the Mobro's.

Looking back, however, the legacy is more complicated. Derided at the time, Harrison's plan to move excess garbage across state lines is now standard practice; according to one expert, New York City now sends out the equivalent of seven Mobros' worth of garbage every day. And his idea to use trash as a source of renewable energy now seems downright visionary, with more than 600 landfill gas projects currently in operation across the U.S. Even the panic about a lack of landfill space turned out to be overblown, as those outdated municipal dumps were in fact being replaced by far larger, regional ones.

But at the time, it was simply too hard for anyone—politicians, environmentalists, or the general public—to look at a garbage barge, dripping ooze, and see a good-news story floating their way.

Michael Hingston is a writer based in Edmonton, Alberta. His book about Calvin and Hobbes will be published in May.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK (COMPOSITE) / MAP BY ATDR, BARGE IMAGE BY FELIX MIZIOZNIKOV

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YOUR DATE WITH MADNESS

COLLEGE BASKETBALL, TOURNAMENT INSANITY, NINE DREAMING TEAMS

BY PHIL HANRAHAN

A TRILLION years ago I played basketball with nine Duke Blue Devils. I was a grad student just out of college, and used to play pickup on campus courts as often as I could. One afternoon in Card Gym, beside Cameron Indoor Stadium, a bunch of Duke players on a neighboring court needed a tenth guy for their own game of pickup before the season. Next thing I knew I was guarding McDonald's All-American Quin Snyder, today head coach of the Utah Jazz, and passing to future NBA players Danny Ferry and Alaa Abdelnaby.

The thing I remember most about that hour in Card was the Blue Devil passing. Get an inch of space on your guy and the ball was in your breadbasket. Zing zing zing, the rock kept changing hands, hitting cutters in perfect rhythm.

That team went to the Final Four, losing 67-59 to the Larry Brown-coached Kansas Jayhawks. KU beat Oklahoma in the final, 83-79, powered by Danny Manning's 31 points, 16 rebounds, and five steals. It's the last time two teams from the same conference squared off at the conclusion of the Big Dance.

Thirty years have passed since "Danny and the Miracles" won it all. In that time, Kansas has gone to the Final Four six times, cutting down the nets again in 2008. Duke, for its part, has cashed in five of its ten Final Four appearances. Both teams are loaded again this year. In fact, one month into the season, Duke and KU topped the college rankings.

But the beauty of the tournament, of course, isn't the bracket-marching of elites but the black swans, the Goliath-topplers. Like when the No. 15 seed Lehigh Mountain Hawks of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, dropped No. 2 seed Duke in 2012.

Or when the Bucknell Bison, a No. 14 seed, knocked off the No. 3-seeded Kansas Jayhawks in 2005, winning 64-63 on a hook shot with 10.5 seconds left.

A No. 16 seed has yet to take down a top seed. But on seven shining occasions, a No. 15 has felled a No. 2. It's one of the sweetest moments in sports—unless the marquee school's your alma mater or you have big money riding on the favorite.

With this sweetness in mind, I make some tournament picks. In the interests of fun, I set myself one rule: No college program that's won it all this century.

In other words, no Duke, KU, Carolina, Kentucky, Villanova. No Florida, Louisville, Connecticut. No Syracuse, Michigan State, or even Maryland (sorry, Terps fans!).

I don't totally give in to insanity. I'm not picking the Dartmouth Big Green to make the Final Four. But I did let my heart guide my head. These are schools I'd like to see make some noise in the Big Dance. Either because they're small or because they represent institutions, of whatever size, with little or no tradition of March Madness thunder.

And if these picks suck, cut me some slack. I'm writing in late 2017!

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY EFKS

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VERMONT

Last year the Catamounts, cream of the America East Conference crop, gave No. 4 Purdue a tough game in round one. They've got their top four scorers back, including six-foot-six forward Anthony Lamb, a baller in Burlington. For inspiration, they can always fire up film from 2005, the year Vermont bested No. 4 Syracuse, winning 60-57 in overtime.



NORTHERN IOWA

Do you remember when the squad from Cedar Falls shocked No. 1 seed Kansas in 2010? Panthers guard Ali Farokhmanesh hit the epic game-winner. In the 2016 tourney, they dropped Texas in round one. Under coach Ben Jacobson, the Panthers find ways to win.



BUCKNELL

The Bison in orange and black are back! Actually they were back last year, when the Patriot League champs put a scare into No. 4 West Virginia, falling 86-80. They've returned nearly their whole rotation, excel at shot selection, and have roster balance, along with veteran smarts.



ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA

Will it be Gonzaga or the Gaels who win the West Coast Conference this year? St. Mary's, a team from a school of 5,000 students, stumbled early, but Randy Bennett's an exceptional coach of 17 years' tenure, and their six-foot-eleven Australian big man, Jock Landale, is a double-double machine. In an early season game against Sacramento State, he scored 37 points and grabbed 16 rebounds.



MINNESOTA

Speaking of early stumbling, the Golden Gophers, a top-25 defense last year, did the same. But the D looks to get even better, Minnesota returns five of its top six scorers, and they have six-foot-ten human eraser Reggie Lynch clogging up the middle. Improve on offense and this Twin Cities' team in gold and maroon, coached by Rick Pitino's son, could make a run.



TEXAS CHRISTIAN

Is it time for TCU? A 24-win team last year, NIT champs, Texas Christian, coached by alumnus Jamie Dixon after his impressive run at Pittsburgh, looks ready to be known for more than just football. They stunned No. 1 Kansas in the 2017 Big 12 tourney. Big up front, the Horned Frogs will make hay in the paint. Will their guards step up, shooting-wise?



ARIZONA STATE

Coached by former Dukie Bobby Hurley, ASU was the talk of college basketball after dropping 95 points on the Jayhawks in December, the highest point-total surrendered by a Bill Self-coached KU team in a non-overtime game. Defense will be the issue for the Sun Devils. If it improves, they should join the Arizona Wildcats as a tourney team to watch.



XAVIER

I'm pulling for the Musketeers to make their first Final Four. No other program has notched as many tournament wins—27—without playing on that final weekend. Last year they took out the No. 2-seeded Wildcats to reach the Elite Eight. Against crosstown rival Cincinnati, then ranked #11, in December, they triumphed 89-76 behind 28 points from superstar Trevon Bluiett. Chris Mack is a coaching whiz. These guys have a real shot.

GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY



I told you I was picking with my heart. What would be more in the spirit of March Madness than to see the Phoenix-based Antelopes, coached by former Phoenix Sun great Dan Majerle, crack the tourney and notch a win in their first year of eligibility? They'll be in the Big Dance if they top the Western Athletic Conference. Best of luck, Antelopes!

Phil Hanrahan is the author of Life After Favre: The Green Bay Packers and Their Fans Usher in the Aaron Rodgers Era. A lifelong Cheesehead, he is currently writing a book set in western Ireland that has nothing to do with football, cheese, or quarterbacking.

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"CLASS REUNION," February 1977

EVERGREEN

In the editorial world, the word "evergreen" refers to stories that will always be interesting to readers. Timeless. Milk that will never go sour. And what could be more evergreen than naked girls in the great outdoors? For centuries, women of all shapes, sizes, colors, and creeds have run out into the sunshine to throw their bras to the wind. We've been lucky that such stunning nymphs let us follow them around with cameras, like the unrepentant pussy worshippers we are.

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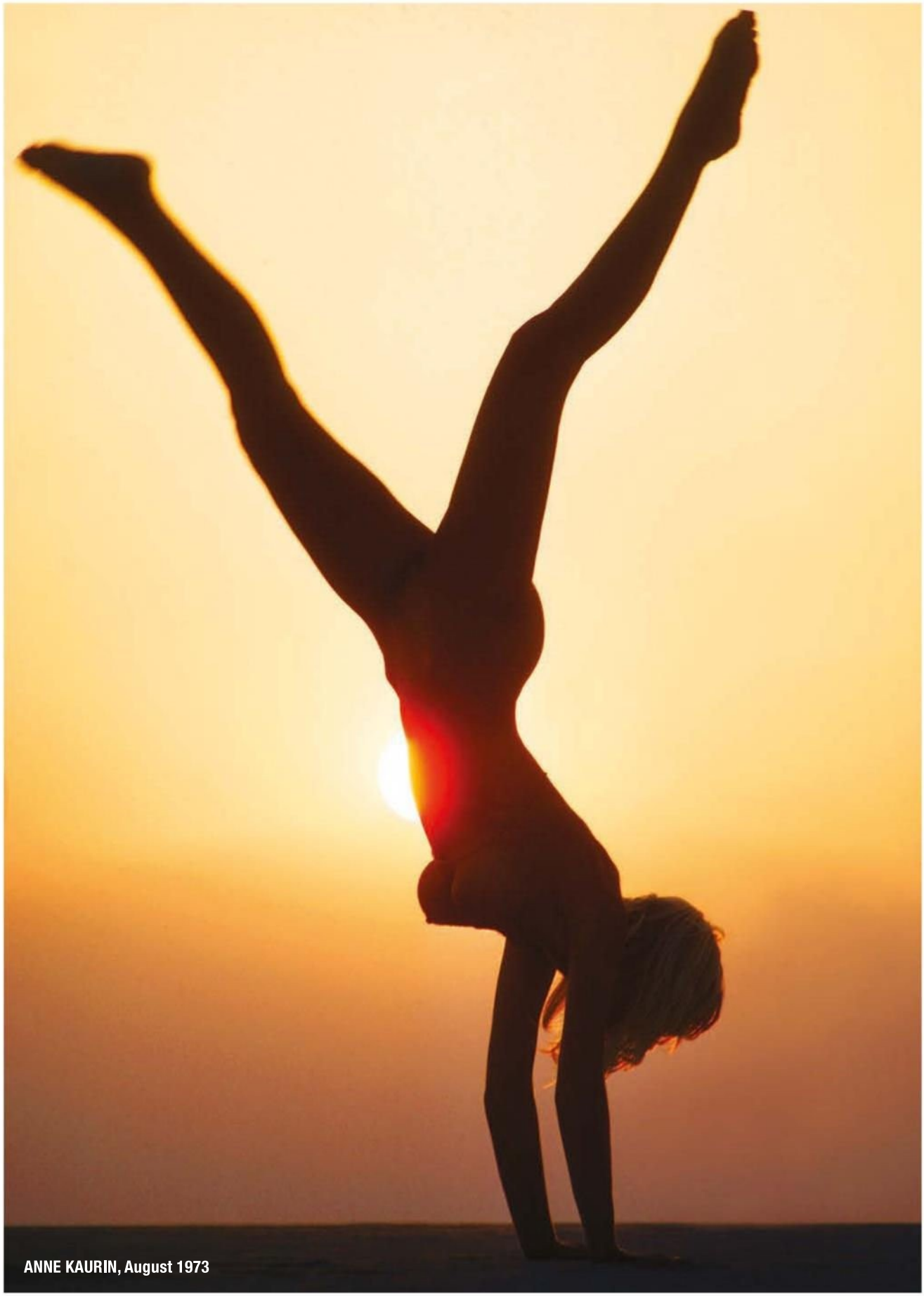


MURIEL ROUSSEAU, April 1982



CAROL and LAURA,
August 1973

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ANNE KAURIN, August 1973

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TAMARA KAPITAS, January 1980

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AvaAdams.net



FRANCIS McAMISH, July 1983

WorldMags.net



LINDA DIANE, May 1973

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HIGH ON FAME

THE RISE OF CANNA-CELEBRITIES IN POST-PROHIBITION AMERICA

BY ZACH SOKOL

ABDULLAH Saeed lives the high life. To marijuana lovers, it's possibly the *dream life*. Every month, the California-based cannabis cultivation company ALAF Farms sends him at least a pound of his favorite strains of marijuana—often OG Kush, which he calls "the definitive Cali weed," or specialties such as the indica-dominant Zkittlez.

When Saeed attends a cannabis conference or expo, he has to bring an empty duffle bag in order to fit all the free swag attendees go out of their way to gift him. If he has a meeting with his William Morris Endeavor agents, they come to his home in the Hollywood Hills, where he'll puff grass on his couch or by the pool while discussing potential opportunities with the suits. Recently, he's been casually fucking around in the booth with rapper Yung Gleesh, and was even photographed at a Diplo house party smoking doobies alongside restaurateur Eddie Huang.

And those are just the trappings of his success. His career is so desirable that at one point he considered starting a podcast called How to Get My Job.

Saeed has been flippantly described as a "professional stoner"—which is true to a degree—though a more fitting term might be "canna-celebrity" or "canna-entertainer."

As the host of VICELAND's cooking show *Bong Appétit* and brainchild of the VICE column-turned-TV-show *Weediquette,* Saeed is one of the most prominent faces associated with cannabis culture, and it's offered him the freedom to get paid to do what he loves most.

On *Bong Appétit,* which wrapped its second season in November and is one of the channel's most-watched programs, Saeed serves as a dinner party host alongside cannabis expert Ry Prichard and culinary wizard/edibles entrepreneur Vanessa Lavorato. Together, they invite notable chefs and cannabis figures to collaborate on over-the-top experimental dishes they prepare with weed before all the guests sit down at a table and get stoned in the most epicurean way possible.

In one episode, Saeed goes to Denver and teams with the owner of Rosenberg's Bagels to make a "multicourse stony and schmaltz-laden Shabbat dinner," featuring medicated matzo ball soup, noodle kugel, and Scandinavian sambuca-cured canna gravlax. In another, he works with the chefs at the California-based Indian restaurant Badmaash to cook tandoori chicken smoked in cannabis flower, barramundi basted in canna-butter and sitting on moilee curry, and naan with full-size pot leaves baked in.

"The intersection of both food porn and weed porn is what really makes the show tick," a reviewer wrote glowingly in *The Cannabist,* the cannabis vertical for the *Denver Post*. Its headline called *Bong Appétit* "the only reality show about weed you need to see."

And it's Saeed who ties the culinary adventures together, guiding guests through the titillating (sometimes intimidating) infused feasts with infinite charisma and natural raconteur skills—all while he consumes harrowing amounts of THC in a way that "makes it look easy."

On top of hosting *Bong Appétit,* Saeed has been involved with much of VICE's other weed-related content. For more than two years, he wrote the weekly "Weediquette" column (journalist Krishna Andavolu hosts the VICELAND version). In the column, Saeed used the nom de plume T. Kid and waxed poetic about smoking with his Pakistani relatives, broke down his contentious relationship with alcohol, and predicted how corporate America will influence the cannabis community after legalization.

Saeed has also hosted documentaries on ketamine infusion therapy, visited Nepal's Annapurna mountains to sample psychoactive honey, and made a number of short-form tutorials called "Smokeables" in which he teaches viewers how to roll cross joints and carve a pipe out of a banana. Plus, he hosted one of VICE's first podcasts, Tea Time With T. Kid, where guests would come by at 4:20 to smoke weed, drink tea, and talk shit. (Full disclosure: I previously worked at VICE for several years and sometimes collaborated with Saeed, including on the podcast.)

In 2016, he cohosted one of the original VICELAND shows, *VICE Does America,* but it wasn't a ratings success. Soon, though, he got the cooking show, which was a hit, and it led Saeed to appearances on *The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore,* "verified" blue checks on Twitter and Instagram, and his acquiring a manager, agent, and lawyer—all for being a gregarious dude with an inimitable penchant for pot.

But what sets Saeed apart from tokers like Snoop Dogg, Tommy Chong, or Willie Nelson is that he's built an audience and name for himself both inside and outside the cannabis industry based specifically on his enthusiasm and expertise about all things dank nug. He's not a rapper who also happens to love weed. He isn't a stand-up known for stoner jokes, like Doug Benson of *Super High Me* fame. He's a personality, an advocate, and "the fucking mascot of this shit," to quote Saeed—someone putting his likeness at the forefront of a movement in America that's 80-plus years in the making, one currently experiencing

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ZACK SOKOL

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Canna-celebrity Abdullah Saeed

a groundswell like never before. And Saeed is just one of many cannabis connoisseurs who's forged a pot personality career.

■■■

AS of January 1, 2018, a total of eight states plus Washington, D.C., will have legalized recreational weed, and 30 states and the District of Columbia will have robust medical marijuana programs. While cannabis is still a Schedule I narcotic in the eyes of the federal government, more and more states are beginning to push for legalization. And why wouldn't they? The global market for cannabis is expected to top $30 billion a year by 2021, and as states like Colorado have illustrated, the potential tax revenue from cannabis sales is too enormous to ignore. In 2016 alone, Colorado sold over $1 billion of legal cannabis and collected over $200 million from marijuana tax, license, and fee revenue—money which will go toward supporting public schools and local infrastructure, among other projects.

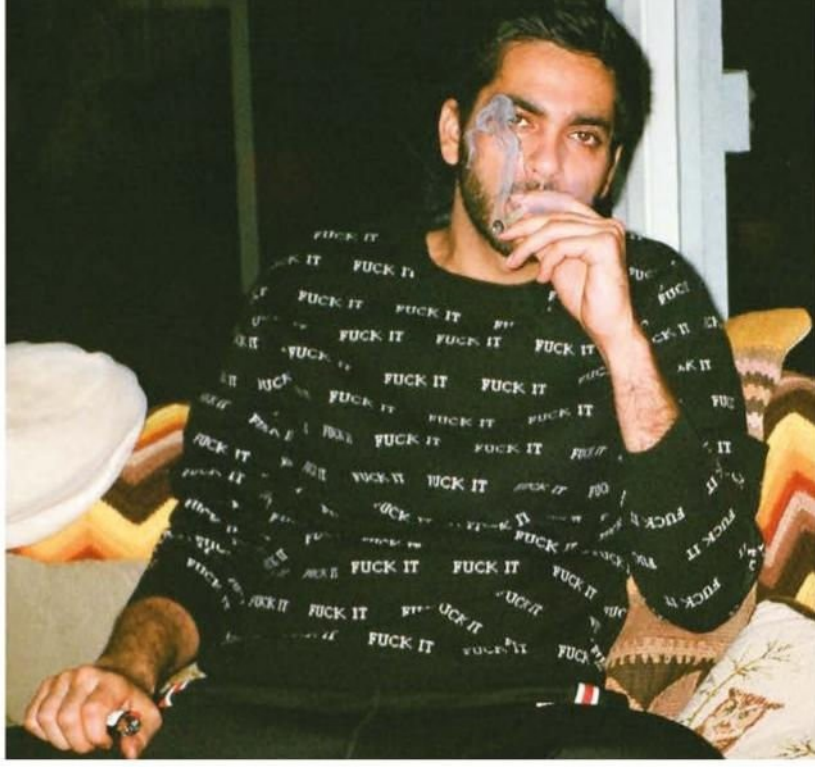
As cannabis legalization continues to spread like, well, a grass fire, all aspects of the plant are becoming subject to the so-called "Green Rush," with new players hopping on the bandwagon, entering the industry, and hoping to make lots of green off another type of green. Silicon Valley veterans are leaving tech jobs for the cannabis industry. Corporate institutions like alcohol magnate Constellation Brands are investing in the space. A number of TV shows about toking, including Netflix's *Disjointed,* Amazon's pilot *Budding Prospects,* and HBO's *High Maintenance,* have sprung up in the past couple years.

In February, an online content platform called 420TV is launching, one that describes itself as the "first and only fully ad-supported VOD network devoted to the wonderful and complex world of cannabis." Everyone and their mother is talking about weed. Hell, there's even an Instagram account called @Dabbing_Granny that boasts half a million followers.

The legal market is swelling, and countless people want a piece of the THC-infused pie. Similar to other underground cultures bubbling up to the mainstream—like skateboarding did in the nineties—there is a need for cannabis companies to have avatars, figureheads, and personalities. In theory, they can help businesses hawk their wares, offer insider cred, and help establish legitimacy, as well as influence the public's perception of something that is still stigmatized and considered taboo. Think

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"I'M RUNNING AHEAD, CARRYING THE TORCH, AND BEING THAT AGITATOR, AND BEHIND ME I'M LEAVING FLAT, EVEN GROUND FOR ALL THESE MOTHERFUCKERS TO COME TRAMPLING ON."

of a weed version of Tony Hawk.

Simultaneously, there are kush aficionados with particular social media identities who are organically and independently building large audiences and even turning hazy online presences into full-on careers—like millennial, marijuana-loving Bam Margeras. In our vast and ever-budding cannabis zeitgeist, there's a demand to put a face to flower, and canna-celebrities, weed-focused social media stars, and other 420 influencers are beginning to emerge as the ambassadors of this verdant sea change.

■■■

ABDULLAH Saeed might be the most impactful of the bunch. The 33-year-old comes from a journalism background, though he's hesitant to use the term in relation to weed because he's "incapable of talking about cannabis without advocating for it," and therefore can't be objective. "Krishna, who hosts the TV version of *Weediquette,* is an unbiased journalist going at it, which is just one approach to getting people to think about [cannabis] differently," Saeed told me. Born in New Hampshire but raised in Thailand before moving back to the states, the Pakistani-American describes himself as an "international kid, but I'm also a little bit third-world hood."

He got his start writing music reviews for Philadelphia alt-weeklies before creating "Adventures in Pork," a food blog detailing his first culinary experiences with the meat he wasn't allowed to eat growing up in a Muslim household. In his mid-twenties, he moved to New York City for a post at MTV, which led to his first job at VICE as a writer-editor at the now-defunct vertical The Creators Project.

Saeed still remembers the moment it became clear that he'd be *the guy* for anything pertaining to pot under the VICE brand. It was 2012, before the company was valued in the billions and had a nightly show on HBO, and Rocco Castoro, then editor in chief, received a gas mask bong in the mail. He asked everyone within earshot if he could make an intern hit it, and when someone said no, he asked the staff if anyone wanted to volunteer. Saeed, who's been smoking weed heavily since he was 14, raised his hand. At the time, he had hair down to his elbows, a full beard, and typically rocked a Philadelphia Eagles jersey.

"I looked very stereotypically like a stoner then," recalled Saeed.

He told me this origin story while whipping up lunch at his house in Los Angeles, which more or less functions as T. Kid HQ. The meal we ate in his dining room was more modest than the canna-culinary delights the perma-blazed host indulges in on television, but Saeed is a pretty modest guy. Sure, he can spin a yarn or go on a truly epic rant like it's his job (which it kind of is), and people have been telling him he should try stand-up since he was puffing on mids out of apple pipes. And not to mention the fact that he can and has outsmoked noted rappers. But part of his magic, his special something, stems from his relatability, his realness.

People say the definition of charisma is when you consistently act like *yourself* no matter who you're around—while still charming them. "100" emojis practically emanate from Abdullah's bloodshot eyes. The dude who made me a turkey sandwich on a croissant at his home is the same magnetic canna-personality I've watched eat CBD pakoras with *Top Chef*'s Fatima Ali on a plasma screen. Unlike getting high, set and setting does not apply when it comes enjoying T. Kid's infectious vibes.

We munched on our sandwiches (pretty tasty, actually!) and continued burning Saeed's favorite OG Kush. After some inevitable tangents, he finished the gas mask bong story.

"I remember pretty distinctly that Rocco tried to over-puff me or something, like he was trying to get me to cough," Saeed told me. "But you can't fuck with the kid. I mean, please. *That's my shit.*" Afterwards, he went back to work as if it were no big deal, despite the whole office reeking. "That attitude got my attention going there," he said. Everyone at VICE already knew he loved weed, but "there was some residual effect, like, 'Oh, that brown kid with the long hair hit the bong.' I feel like that moment eased the rest of my career there."

Fast-forward five years, 15 web episodes of *Bong Appétit,*

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ZACK SOKOL

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two seasons and another 20 episodes of the same show on VICELAND, plus a couple dozen other video and production projects ("Smokeables" garnered 30 million Facebook views for the banana pipe clip alone). *Bong Appétit* was now a crossover success outside VICE's typical 18-24 male demographic. Saeed wanted the show's audience to be "people who live on the edge of the acceptance of cannabis," as compared to those already interested in pot culture, and he often asserts that "my battle is social, not political." He aimed for *Bong Appétit* to be "a tool to say, 'Look Mom, look Dad, look Steve, or whatever, there are normal people who do normal things with cannabis, and I get that. I want you to see this and get that, too.' And the crazy thing is that it's worked."

A memorable NPR write-up started with the reviewer detailing how her 65-year-old mother first hipped her to the online version. Saeed's work with VICE also established him as one of the earliest OG media presences of the modern cannabis era to embrace his passion for the herb on camera. "When I started owning the phrase 'cannabis journalist,'" Saeed told me, "I really was the guy to coin that shit in terms of the post-legalization context. I was kind of on the *I'm so future* tip, like, 'You guys don't even get this yet.'"

■■■

IN November, Saeed announced that he'd no longer be collaborating with VICE after several employees were accused of sexual misconduct. (He was not one of them.) In a press release in response to the allegations, the company used *Bong Appétit* as an example of why it has staff sign a "non-traditional workplace agreement." The series was called "provocative" and described as an exploration of "drug culture," which Saeed did not take kindly to.

SAEED AIMED FOR *BONG APPÉTIT* TO BE "A TOOL TO SAY, 'LOOK MOM, LOOK DAD...THERE ARE NORMAL PEOPLE WHO DO NORMAL THINGS WITH CANNABIS, AND I GET THAT. I WANT YOU TO SEE THIS AND GET THAT, TOO.' AND THE CRAZY THING IS THAT IT'S WORKED."

"My purpose is to explore cannabis and spread knowledge about substances that enlighten us, and I'll continue that journey with like-minded entities," he posted on social media. "Additionally, I don't believe cannabis is a drug, nor would I characterize its study and advocacy as provocative."

And though he's leaving an undeniably massive platform where he cut his teeth, the canna-celeb already has big moves in the pipeline, including a role on the second season of HBO's weed comedy *High Maintenance*. He's also developing a new documentary project that he believes will be his "weed opus," as well as writing a memoir that will likely sell itself.

"What am I going to call my fucking memoir? *Weed, The Kid*. I'm that thing personified," he chuckled. However, Saeed feels he's already accomplished a lot by initiating a precedent for cannabis personalities.

"If the whole cannabis activist world, and that whole shade of journalism, is behind me, and I'm the midpoint," Saeed reflected, "then the future ahead of me is this whole 'Instagram stars of weed' thing. I'm running ahead, carrying the torch, and being that agitator, and behind me I'm leaving flat, even ground for all these motherfuckers to come trampling on."

■■■

ONE such "motherfucker" is Thomas Araujo, aka Dope as Yola. For the past five years, the 28-year-old has built a reputation as a social media weed star and entrepreneur—a weedfluencer, if you will.

I met Araujo and his girlfriend/collaborator Rosie Ruyz (@stoner_dottie) at Hitman Coffee, a members-only pipe gallery, café, and coworking space based in downtown L.A. In the backyard, where members are allowed to BYOC (bring your own cannabis), the content creator packed a glass bong and explained how he went from illegally selling weed in bumfuck Merced, California, to creating an Instagram account that's followed by Rihanna and endorsed by enough companies that he was able to quit his day job and relocate.

Araujo was an early adopter of the app, and "started uploading content at the very beginning of Instagram, when the thought of posting photos of yourself with weed online was fucking ridiculous," as he put it, due to privacy and legal risks. He had no prior experience taking photos or video, but he's always been a self-described movie buff with a unique sense of humor. The couple began posting photos of movie scenes recreated using nugs of weed, sometimes with Araujo Photoshopped in. "It was all pictures that I thought would make you stop, look twice, and go, 'Oh my God, it's fucking weed!'"

One post from his social media salad days involved a nug tied with a hemp wick to a mini wooden chair bought at a dollhouse supply store. In subsequent images, another bud cuts the imprisoned nug's "ear" off in a nod to the infamous torture scene in *Reservoir Dogs*. Less than a year after he created his Instagram handle, Araujo's images were getting shared on popular meme accounts like @Weedstagram, reposted by celebrities, and featured on the Instagram "Explore" page.

"We were some of the first people to really fuck with weed on Instagram," Araujo said in between bong rips at Hitman Coffee. But even if he wasn't a pot pioneer on social media, it's likely the weed memer would have still found an audience. His creations have a distinct voice—sort of like a fusion between a CollegeHumor sketch and a Michel Gondry music video, but caked with the playful braggadocio of a part-time weed dealer—and the sensibility blazes through to IRL conversation.

Every anecdote he told me came equipped with an excess of hand gestures, and he packed in movie references and pop culture analogies wherever he could. Other Hitman Coffee patrons immediately noticed him talking up a storm in the space's backyard, and several regulars interrupted our conversation to say hey and pay respect. Maybe it was the weed, but I lost my shit after Araujo detailed how he often measures valuables in "units of used Hondas"—a metric that only a former pot peddler could have conceived. "That's a nice Mercedes you're smoking out of!" he said while describing an expensive glass dab rig.

Once Instagram added video, Araujo increased his output and also began uploading "video memes and skits," scoring several viral hits in the process. Around the same time, he and Ruyz started a 420-friendly apparel brand called Push Trees, and the first limited-edition run sold out within 24 hours.

@_Dope_as_Yola_ was racking up followers, too, at one point accruing close to 400,000 before his account was shut down (something that's happened to him nearly a dozen times since). These successes led to a number of brands in the cannabis space reaching out and offering endorsement deals and creative consulting opportunities, including rolling paper giant Raw. At

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one point, he told me, a major seltzer company—which has no formal ties to marijuana—even got in touch to talk about possible collaborations.

"Back then, I had no idea that people got paid for this shit," Araujo continued, then added, in a tone of disbelief: "Now I'm on contract and it's like, *Fuck! I'm making more money than my parents!* "

Raw pays him to use its papers in @_Dope_as_Yola_ content, something he was already doing. And though the contract stipulates that Araujo must exclusively use Raw, he retains total creative control.

"There was no guideline, it was just, 'Hey, keep doing what you're doing, and here's money,'" Araujo said. After all, the @_Dope_as_Yola_ Instagram bio used to state, "I want to make weed commercials" (though he's quick to add in person that he never wants his work to actually feel like ads). Not only did the dream come true, but Araujo's since grown his brand outside Instagram, including video host gigs for dispensaries like Urban Treez and marijuana publications like *Merry Jane*. [Editor's note: Full disclosure, the author is currently an editor at *Merry Jane,* though he has not directly collaborated with Araujo.] He even has hard-core fans, and has counted upwards of 25 people who have tattoos of the Push Trees logo—his mom even has ink that says "Dope as Yola."

"If you think about it, it's really the only time in life where you can literally blow your brand up off of a video or image you made on your phone," Araujo remarked. "You can get famous off one baby thing, one little video. We live in the luckiest time. It's crazy—ten years ago brands wouldn't have got big off a funny picture posted online or on Reddit."

GREEN Street Agency agrees with Araujo's observation, and the company's existence is a testament to this emerging canna-celeb business within the larger cannabis industry. The full-service creative agency focuses on marketing, advertising, client services, and brand development "all dedicated to the [cannabis] space."

On top of facilitating brand partnerships—such as Snoop Dogg's deal with G Pen vaporizers—Green Street helps influencers and personalities turn their clout into a career. Saeed hipped me to the company, and described them as trustworthy insiders who know



Thomas Araujo, aka Dope as Yola

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THOMAS ARAUJO AND ROSIE RUYZ

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how to navigate the corporate world without green-washing the image of their cannabis clients.

Founded by lawyer Josh Shelton and former record label exec Rama Mayo in 2013, Green Street is gearing up to be the go-to ad firm for weed. They currently work with mainstream weed-friendly celebrities, including Snoop Dogg, The Game, Melissa Etheridge, and 2 Chainz, but they're also teaming with up-and-coming cannabis personalities from the social media space, such as vlogger CustomGrow420 (1.4 million subscribers on YouTube) and Adam III (aka "The Highest Host" and "The Kosher Stoner").

In addition, Green Street is opening a 50,000 square foot office in Los Angeles this year to house both the agency and other cannabis-facing companies. They imagine the space as a We(ed)Work of sorts—a "foundation for the community" with a talent agency vibe.

"That's our plan," said Mayo. "We want to build the Makers for weed. Let's harness the YouTube-verse and turn that into the platform."

Green Street is focused on the long tail, and the founders know their business is a bit premature given the precarious status of widespread legalization.

"The digital age of marketing really doesn't exist in the cannabis industry yet," Mayo told me at their original office in the historic Wilshire Tower, where they also host cannabis-related events and parties. (Not by coincidence, they shared the building with the West Coast office of *High Times*). Due to federal regulations, Mayo pointed out, including restrictions on advertising, "We are handcuffed a little bit on how we can market."

That said, Green Street has noticed that "there's this white space for someone who has a following to then lead that following back to a cannabis-related company"—a business opportunity they are experts at catalyzing. In other words, if an independent personality has organically built a sizable audience and has an original voice, Green Street can help that canna-entertainer monetize whatever it is they do. By the time recreational legalization is a reality in more states, the company is poised to streamline the process and take on countless more clients.

■■■

A CANNABIS creative agency is "a sign of the times," said Brian Vicente, cofounder of premier marijuana law firm Vicente Sederberg LLC. Vicente was one of the main authors of Amendment 64, the landmark measure that legalized recreational marijuana use for adults in Colorado, and his firm employs over 50 staffers with offices in the Centennial State, Massachusetts, Nevada, and California. The team's L.A. office is currently two blocks away from Green Street, and Vicente Sederberg LLC will also occupy a section of the creative agency's impending mega-office.

Like Thomas Araujo did when we met, Vicente underscored how modern the nascent canna-celebrity profession is within legal weed: "We live in this incredible moment when there's a confluence of a massive social change—after 80 years, suddenly marijuana legalization is here. It's sort of intersecting with this unique moment in time when people can promote themselves online, become celebrities, and also make a living. It's pretty phenomenal."

The law firm works with clients from all facets of the marijuana industry, from dispensaries that need help acquiring licenses, to "bigger-name celebrities" launching weed products. Increasingly, Vicente Sederberg LLC advises individuals in the canna-entertainer and social media space who seek to legitimize their hustles and profit from them. In a phone interview, Vicente explained that his staff does "a fair amount of work advising these up-and-coming celebrities who are self-made, trying to figure out what is their niche and how can they promote themselves and find a career in this space without running afoul of the law."

For example, Vicente said he's helped at least 400 clients—both direct marijuana businesses and ancillary ones—with banking, which "is *frequently* an issue." Banks are often regulated by the feds, and therefore will restrict individuals and businesses from taking out loans, applying for mortgages, and even depositing cash if they work with, or are adjacent to, ganja.

"You need to understand the state and federal laws that govern that," said Vicente. "We walk people through a lot of that."

There are a multitude of other hurdles cannabis entrepreneurs must navigate, regardless of what state they live in. Business owners are often prohibited from using PayPal or having their apps appear in the Apple Store, and social media weed stars regularly have their accounts taken down by Facebook and Instagram for promoting what the federal government still considers to be an illegal narcotic.

"AFTER 80 YEARS, SUDDENLY MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION IS HERE. IT'S SORT OF INTERSECTING WITH THIS UNIQUE MOMENT IN TIME WHEN PEOPLE CAN PROMOTE THEMSELVES ONLINE, BECOME CELEBRITIES, AND ALSO MAKE A LIVING."

"We try to work with these larger corporations and convince them to allow our clients access to their platforms," Vicente explained. "Sometimes they let us and sometimes they don't."

The attorney continued, "You have very little recourse to fight that, so you can see how frustrating that could be to someone who's built a solid network on Instagram or Facebook and has then had that torn down."

■■■

THIS is exactly what happened to Dope as Yola, whose Instagram bio in late 2017 stated "Deleted at 343k & 99k" [followers]. Players in the marijuana space are liable to threats that are fully out of their control—vulnerabilities they're very much aware of but cannot safeguard. If your weed career depends on social media, your entire livelihood could be cut off without warning, even if you didn't break any laws.

"A lot of the people who used to be on Instagram don't do Instagram anymore because they keep getting deleted and they gave the fuck up," Araujo told me.

Hiring a lawyer from Vicente Sederberg LLC is a shield, but admittedly a porous one until marijuana is federally descheduled. Therefore, some in the weed game are hesitant to make social media their only source of promotion or income, and others are intent on creating entirely new platforms for pot.

Dr. Dina has worked in cannabis full-time since 2003, but it took a full decade before she became a bona fide canna-celeb known outside the direct community.

"There was a time when I was afraid to tell people what I did for a living. It wasn't the same then," said the dispensary owner, who

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is widely considered to be the inspiration for Nancy Botwin on Showtime's *Weeds*. Dr. Dina isn't actually a doctor—Snoop Dogg, a longtime friend, gave her the nickname—but she's considered an authority on the plant and cannabis culture nonetheless.

For years, she stayed under the radar and did not associate her name with her medical marijuana business, but a 2013 *GQ* piece outed her as the pot plug for Snoop. After that, Dr. Dina decided to own her narrative and use the attention to "just talk about cannabis." In a lengthy phone interview, she explained her initial goals as a marijuana advocate in the spotlight. "I said, 'I don't want talk about myself, but I'll talk about weed and why it should be legal!'"

Described by the press as the "Queen of Cannabis," the "Mona Lisa of Mary Jane," and "Pot Doc to the Stars," Dr. Dina is one of Hollywood's most in-demand cannabis consultants, and has advised on shows such as *Sons of Anarchy* and Netflix's pot shop sitcom *Disjointed,* starring Kathy Bates. And while she imagined herself as a behind-the-scenes figure in the space, times have changed and she is evolving with the THC-laden zeitgeist. Social media has proven to be unstable—the pot doc even referenced Dope as Yola's troubles with Instagram during our interview—but she's found a new soapbox to share her story and proselytize to the masses about marijuana.

420TV, the aforementioned digital network for on-demand cannabis content, debuts in late February, and Dr. Dina will be hosting *Top Shelf,* one of the online channel's tentpole programs. In the ten-episode documentary series, the canna-celeb travels across the country on the "ultimate cannabis road trip," touring pot farms, dispensaries, and other green businesses. "I'm hoping to turn it into the *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown* of weed," she said.

Why commit to an untested network when she's already consulting on *Disjointed* at the Warner Bros. studio? "420TV is fighting against the corporate-controlled social media platforms by accepting our culture," Dr. Dina pointed out, "and offering a new space to lead the conversation about cannabis without arbitrary restrictions."

Not everyone is convinced that ganja-specific content platforms will be the solution for sidestepping marijuana media limitations and establishing mainstream legitimacy, though.

"There have been a handful of media platforms that have been trying to get their arms around the cannabis industry," Green Street's Josh Shelton told me. "There's going to be a hundred of those. It's going to be a ton of noise for at least the next couple of years…where people are regretful of the investments they made and the influencers or projects and wheels spinning that come crashing down."

And veteran figures from the community are skeptical, too—not just about new ways to showcase weed personalities, but about weed personalities as a commodity in general.

"There was no 'famous for being famous' in cannabis until very recently," said David Bienenstock, a seasoned cannabis journalist and producer, former *High Times* editor, and the author of seminal toking tome *How to Smoke Pot (Properly)*. Over the phone, he told me that "the people who've brought you bad entertainment for the past 40 years are going to continue making bad entertainment, and have been. Dreck is coming from the top and from the bottom of [cannabis culture]."

The bigger issue to lifers like Bienenstock, who was dedicated to legalizing grass eons before adult-use legislation was on the horizon, is whether these content creators and public-facing personalities "exude a real responsibility to get things right, educate themselves, and be a good representation of the culture. That's a mark of real delineation between coming up out of the culture and parachuting in."

As for Dr. Dina, she told me that one of her long-term goals outside nationwide legalization is to carefully consider how this era's cannabis figures, herself included, influence the next. In the words of this cannabis mainstay: "Do you have a legacy left behind that is so powerful that it continues to inspire people on a daily basis?"

Her involvement with 420TV is an optimistic sign, but it remains to be seen if the platform and its other programming will satisfy both the "converted and the curious," as it slogan attests.

■■■

ABDULLAH Saeed, ever the zen master, is less concerned with how his peers typify marijuana enthusiasts. Hours after we ate lunch at his place in Hollywood Hills, we posted up in his room and continued smoking joints while talking about the phenomenon of canna-celebrities and what future iterations might look like. Next to his bed were a thousand Bic lighters with PLEASE RETURN TO ABDULLAH SAEED engraved on them. "You can't control their intentions, all you can do is pass the torch," he said once again.

"MY THINKING ON IT IS A LITTLE BIT MORE RADICAL. I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO BUY AND SELL WEED; I THINK YOU SHOULD ONLY BE ABLE TO GROW IT AND GIVE IT AWAY."

When Saeed thinks about big-picture plans, he shares a vision of cannabis focused on its social benefits. In response to what's happening legally and economically with pot, he said, "My thinking on it is a little bit more radical. I don't think you should be able to buy and sell weed; I think you should only be able to grow it and give it away. I'm skeptical about the capitalist approach to legalization as opposed to the justice approach."

Moreover, his plans don't end with weed. Puffing on his OG Kush and wearing a shirt patterned with the words FUCK IT, he laid out the end goal—one he reiterated several times over the course of our marathon smoke sesh. "Advocating for cannabis," Saeed said, "is a stepping stone for advocating for psychedelics. I want to get more people to use cannabis so they're more amenable to using psychedelics, because *that* will make the world a better place."

And regardless of his idealism, he knows he can't sway what will happen when Big Weed comes knocking. Instead, he plans to keep on keeping on, doing his thing like he always has. "If I can have an impact on the world by doing what I love and pursuing what I think is right," Saeed told me, "and the world accepts that, so be it. I'm not going to *not* try because they might not accept it. I didn't make a fucking career not offending people. I just want to change people's minds, man."

Zach Sokol is a writer and editor living in Brooklyn, New York. His writing has appeared in VICE, The Paris Review, Playboy, and Art in America, among other publications. He has also produced documentaries and curated art exhibitions, including a 2016 group show held in an empty U-HAUL storefront in Manhattan.

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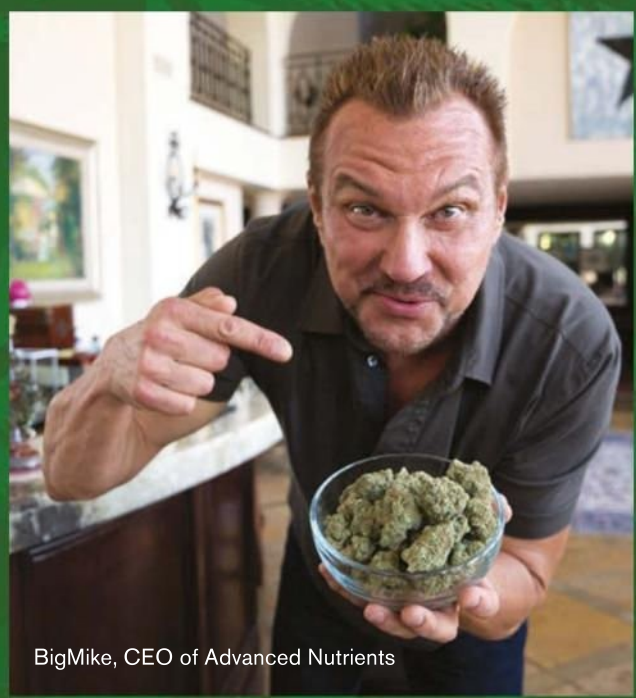
BIGMIKE ON THE BUSINESS OF MARIJUANA

By Zach Sokol

THOUGH certain canna-celebs are brands in and of themselves, some weed personalities use their notoriety to complement or enhance their other cannabis enterprises. Take BigMike, for example. Born Michael Straumietis in Portland, Oregon, the six-foot-seven marijuana titan is the CEO of Advanced Nutrients, a fertilizer and nutrient manufacturer serving hydroponic growers and cultivators.

The company distributes its products to nearly 100 countries, and expects 2017 revenue to approach $105 million. Advanced Nutrients offers a vital service intersecting with many aspects of the cannabis industry, but fertilizer is admittedly not the sexiest facet of weed culture. Therefore, BigMike took to Instagram, where he built a massive following showcasing his high-roller lifestyle while subtly promoting his business, too.

"In today's day and age, social media is paramount," BigMike told me at his Hollywood Hills mansion, standing on a gargantuan deck overlooking the city. "If you're not on social media in a strong way, you're going to be dead fast."



BigMike, CEO of Advanced Nutrients

BigMike started Advanced Nutrients 18 years ago, and he's never been shy about putting his face in front of flower. "From day one," the CEO continued, "I said we're for cannabis. I never hid it. I never hid behind a fucking tomato vine my whole life."

In the early days, he occasionally uploaded photos of weed and women to the internet, but once Instagram and Facebook were omnipresent, the entrepreneur upped the ante. Now, he regularly posts photos of himself alongside luscious bud, luscious models, and luscious models smoking luscious bud. Boasting an Instagram account with 1.4 million followers, BigMike has been called "The Great Gatsby of Ganja" and "The Dan Bilzerian of Weed," though he personally rejects the nicknames in favor of the "Marijuana Don," his onetime Instagram handle.

"A company is just a benign object. Once you attach a face to it, and it's a likable face, that's power," BigMike explained. "People don't want to do business with a boring brand. They want to have fun, and the best brands in the world have CEOs who are entertaining."

More importantly, he's able to slip in some cannabis education and Advanced Nutrients promotion among the international playboy-friendly content.

"You have to put sugar around the medicine," he joked. "That's how I get their attention so that I can give them the message I want. We're using [our social media clout] to not only build the brand, but as we're building that brand, we're educating everyone out there, too."

He also works to forge relationships that could give him "a seat at the table with the big boys," as he put it, when it comes to cannabis legislation. For example, a few hours before the start of his annual Halloween mega-party, BigMike held a fund-raiser for Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, a pro-legalization advocate running for governor of California in 2018.

And while Advanced Nutrients is fully compliant with the law, and doesn't even touch the plant, BigMike's prominent social media presence has led to its own complications. When I asked him how he planned to document his costume party, he said, "In this case, we listen to City Hall. They told us, 'No social media.' When I handle big bags of weed at a party [and post photos], they get too many fucking phone calls. The board lights up, and they don't want that."

The Halloween bash was over-the-top, to put it lightly. When guests arrived (via mandatory, comped Ubers, to prevent drugged driving) at BigMike's gated home, they were greeted with a spectacle not unlike an invite-only cannabis Coachella. The redecorated mansion was swarming with actors portraying zombies and other ghoulish characters. Along with an open bar featuring a woman swinging from a hula hoop-size ring, there was a weed bar where guests chose the strain they wanted, with budtenders ready to roll them thumb-size joints. A swank buffet included lobster, oysters, sushi, and a medley of infused edibles.

One of the estate's several decks was transformed into a temporary stage and dance floor. The Grammy-winning band Everlast played earlier that day during the Newsom fund-raiser, but now it was occupied by a hazy sea of costumed guests, including MMA superstar Chuck Liddell. BigMike himself, dressed as the King of Hearts, was accompanied by an entourage of gorgeous women as he schmoozed with extremely stoned partygoers throughout his sprawling property.

A few hours into the party, however, a helicopter spotlight shone down on the festivities. Shortly after, a horde of police officers appeared in the yard. The immediate response was mellow; I even heard one guest say to the cops, without a speck of irony, "Sick costumes, *duuudes*." But soon enough, the five-0 shut down the party, even though no laws were broken.

Maybe a noise complaint led to the party's demise. Or maybe BigMike is just on the cops' shit list as a result of celebrating his vibrant relationship with pot on social media. Regardless, it seemed to underscore the limitations of weed fame. Even with legalization taking root, the Cannabis King of Instagram isn't free from the LAPD cramping his high style.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ADVANCED NUTRIENTS

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RAPE IN PEACE AND WAR

BY ALAN M. DERSHOWITZ

INCREASING attention has been paid to the horrible crime of rape during peacetime. Recent focus has been on hierarchical rapes—that is, sexual assault committed by people in positions of authority over their victims. But the most common form of rape throughout world history has been as a weapon of war. Historically the victor in a battle had the power to "rape and pillage" the losers. Modern rules of warfare are now making rape a war crime if committed by soldiers under the direction of their commanders. This is because rape continues to be a weapon of war even today.

There are several kinds of rape that are used as weapons. During the war in the former Yugoslavia, enemy women were raped and deliberately impregnated in order to cause them to bear the children of the victors. During the Holocaust, the opposite approach was taken. Jewish women were raped and then murdered. I recently learned that a 16-year-old cousin of mine, who was very beautiful, was repeatedly raped by Nazi soldiers in Poland and then murdered.

Among some terrorists, rape is used as a prelude to turning the victim into a suicide bomber. She is deliberately raped, and thus, under the local culture, dishonored. Her family, too, is dishonored by her victimization. The only way to restore the family's honor is for the woman to die as a terrorist martyr.

Yet, despite these atrocities, the United Nations and other human rights groups have paid less attention than they should to the use of rape as a weapon of war. This is because human rights organizations generally apply a double standard: one for Western democracies and the other for less developed parts of the world. It is also because the United Nations and other human rights groups spend a disproportionate amount of time and resources on one Western democracy, namely Israel. The U.N. Human Rights Council, for example, devotes more than half of its agenda to Israel's disputed policies and almost none of its agenda to the serious issue of rape.

A related reason for this general neglect of rape as a war crime is the politicization of human rights in general and of rape in particular. Consider the following academic paper, written by hard-left doctoral candidate Tal Nitzan from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She began her thesis by noting that Israel has one of the best records in the world with regard to their soldiers raping enemy civilians.

When she could not find instances of rape by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Nitzan hypothesized that "the lack of organized military rape is an alternate way of realizing [particular] political goals." Rape by soldiers, infrequent as it is, is taken very seriously and punished quite severely. As a result, it almost never occurs. So that is the data point from which the thesis was developed.

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RAPE IS A CRIME OF VIOLENCE, AS WELL AS A CRIME OF SEXUAL GRATIFICATION. THE VERY NOTION THAT YOUR VICTIM HAS TO BE SEEN AS HUMANIZED IS PREPOSTEROUS.

It is her conclusion that is so remarkable. She argued that the reason Israeli soldiers do not rape Palestinian women is due to an Israeli government program which teaches IDF soldiers that Palestinian women are subhuman, inferior, and unworthy, and therefore not appropriate objects of sexual assault.

Nitzan wrote: "In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it can be seen that the lack of military rape merely strengthens the ethnic boundaries and clarifies the inter-ethnic differences–just as organized military rape would have done."

This conclusion is so absurd that it does not warrant a serious response. But if a serious response is to be given, it is only necessary to point out how frequently Nazi soldiers raped the Jewish women who they had dehumanized beyond the point of any recognition.

Rape is a crime of violence, as well as a crime of sexual gratification. The very notion that your victim has to be seen as humanized is preposterous. Tal Nitzan's thesis is a prime example of primitive anti-Semitism. The core belief of the anti-Semite is that if a Jew does anything good, it must be for a bad motive. If Jewish soldiers do good by not raping Palestinians, it must be because they are badly motivated by their dehumanization of potential victims.

The world must move toward zero tolerance regarding rape both in wartime and in peacetime. This will not be easy to accomplish, especially during wartime, because the use of rape as a weapon of war has such deep roots in world history. But we must do everything possible to eliminate this scourge from our planet.

Alan M. Dershowitz is professor emeritus at Harvard Law School and author of Trumped Up: How Criminalization of Political Differences Endangers Democracy, which is now available. Follow him @AlanDersh

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FALL FROM GRACE

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Our March Pet of the Month, Alexa Grace, is the whole package: sweet, smart, sophisticated, and she hates Florida. Alexa studied film in college and quickly went from being a PA behind the lens to one of the industry's favorite adult stars. Besides having perfect skin and the grace of Katharine Hepburn, she's 5'10" with an ass that won't quit. Need we say more?

Photography: Gerald De Behr

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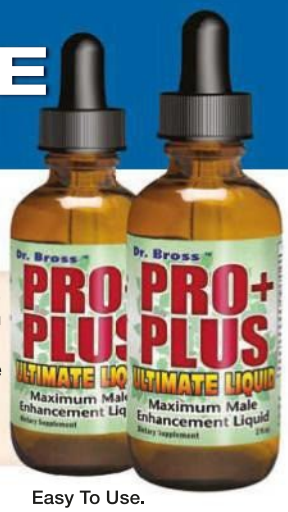
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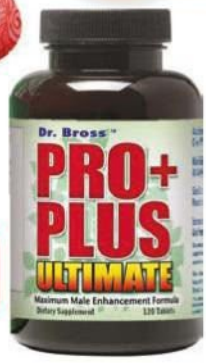
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Vital Stats:
32A-23-37
23 years old
5'10"

Hometown: Orlando, Florida

How did you end up in the adult industry?

I was working as a PA on an independent feature and one of the producers asked me if I modeled. I had already started building up a modeling portfolio, and then when I was asked about it, I decided to give it a try.

Were you nervous going from behind the lens to in front of it?

My only concern was whether being in the adult would affect my mainstream opportunities. I was going to film school at the time. Then I found out it didn't matter and so I went for it. It's not like I was planning to work with children in the future.

What was the first thing you did when you graduated high school?

I went straight to college.

You were a good girl.

I went to school in Orlando. I hated it. It was awful. Crazy shit was always happening! It was constant. I was so happy to get out of there.

Did you stay for your entire degree?

Yeah, but I got my bachelor's degree in film in two years, not four. My dream was to work in big motion picture films. I loved the thought of being a camera operator and creating the image that appears on the screen. Honestly, there was nothing else I wanted to do but film.

Would you rather never speak or never hear again?

That's such a tough one! But I would say never speak. I can always learn sign language, but if I couldn't hear there would be no alternative.

A world without music. Think about that.

I know. Being on mute all the time.

What is your favorite movie?

Forrest Gump. Come on, it's a great movie filled with history about a sweet man who just gets used his entire life–I mean, I hate Jenny. I hate her so much. But the love, the loss! I love it. The cast is amazing. Tom Hanks is my favorite actor, hands down. Who else can you cry over losing a volleyball?

You were basically a robot if you didn't cry over Wilson.

Ha! 🗝

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FEATURE

ORO VERDE (GREEN GOLD)

Tucked away in the isolated mountainsides of the Mexican state of Guerrero, poor communities of farmers have turned to producing opium for the drug cartels.

BY ALASDAIR BAVERSTOCK

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRETT GUNDLOCK

TO the trained eye, an opium field isn't difficult to spot—its color gives it away. Speckled with purple and crimson, the jade-green meadows look otherworldly on the steep hillsides of the high Mexican sierras, where they sit alongside larger plots of avocados and peaches in an effort to hide the valuable crop from helicopters.

Look closer and you will see the harvesters. Children are preferred for this work. Armed with only a razor blade and a plastic cup, they are more agile on the sheer slopes around their mountain villages, and their small hands are ideal for delicately scoring the opium bulb to let the narcotic paste seep slowly out.

"It's very hard work, and it's all about patience," says 58-year-old Arturo Lopez, as he gently scrapes the latex from the cut around the seedpod's surface. Holding it up to the sunlight, he nods his approval at this half-gram of sticky gum.

"Oro verde," he smiles. Green gold.

Lopez, who's originally from Mexico City, has been farming opium in the remote mountain villages of western Guerrero state for 40 years. It's one of Mexico's most inaccessible regions, though Acapulco, on Guerrero's pristine shoreline, remains one of the Pacific coast's more popular resorts.

Having arrived here as a government foresting engineer, Lopez saw the first poppy fields spring up as the drug cartels from the north expanded their operation southwards, decreasing their dependence on Colombian opium.

When his government forestry department was shut down, Lopez stayed, marrying a local woman and seeking employment in the mountains where his expertise could be put to use.

Since then, Lopez has consecutively been town mayor, regional hospital director, and founder and chief of the

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Guerrero Opium Farmers' Union, which recently defied Mexico's federal government by refusing to stop cultivating poppies, harvesting the opium, and selling it to narcotraffickers.

"Of the 50,000 people who live in this region, 90 percent of us harvest and sell opium," he says, looking out over the rolling hills from the town's only restaurant, from where the state capital, Chilpancingo, is visible in the distance, over a mile lower in altitude. "Every mountain village in Guerrero produces opium, and our entire economy depends on it. By this point, there's no turning back."

■ ■ ■

GUERRERO produces more than half the raw material that fuels the United States's heroin epidemic, which results in more than 13,000 deaths a year. The state alone is the world's third biggest producer of opium, behind Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Opium first arrived in North America with Chinese railway laborers, who established plantations in the foothills of the Rockies, and in mountainous regions from Oregon to Sinaloa in Mexico, where the terrain is ideal for opium cultivation.

While the United States cracked down on the opium dens of San Francisco, the Civil War brought a surge in demand for morphine, and both the Union and Confederacy turned to Mexico for its painkillers. History repeated itself during World War II, when neutral Mexico supplied American military hospitals with opiates.

Thirty years later, as the drug cartels began to supply the U.S. with Colombian cocaine through Miami, and Mexican marijuana via California, entrepreneurial Latin Americans took advantage of the American government's crackdown on the French Connection–opium from Turkey, turned into "golden brown" (referring to its color, and coined by the Stranglers' eponymous 1981 song: "Never a frown/ with golden brown") in Marseille, France, and then trafficked through New York.

CHILDREN ARE PREFERRED FOR HARVESTING OPIUM. ARMED WITH ONLY A RAZOR BLADE AND A PLASTIC CUP, THEY ARE MORE AGILE ON THE SHEER SLOPES AROUND THEIR MOUNTAIN VILLAGES.

Today, three types of heroin dominate the North American market: the highly processed and purified china white from Colombia, the cruder but no less potent golden brown from Europe, and Mexican black tar (heroin acetate, or home-baked heroin), which now accounts for the vast majority of heroin trafficked into America. On the U.S.-Mexico border, from California to Texas, heroin seizures have jumped 150 percent since 2010.

In Mexico, narcotics were traditionally produced in the Golden Triangle, an area of western Mexico which includes the states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa. In these labyrinthine highlands that raised Mexico's most famous drug kingpin, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, marijuana and opium were grown with impunity.

As the Sinaloa Cartel established its dominance across Mexico, its captains, based in Acapulco, noticed that the remote hills and high altitude of the interior would be ideal for opium cultivation.

Going from village to village, the drug cartel brought seeds and knowledge of the brightly colored plant to the impoverished farmers of the sierras, promising great rewards to those who would supply opium at the end of their harvest.

Fueled by the ravenous demand and enabled by a corrupt state police force and weak judicial system, opium production exploded in Guerrero. Today, an estimated 30,000 acres are given over to poppy fields.

When Lopez arrived in the sierras 40 years ago, just 2,000 farmers were involved in opium cultivation. He now estimates his union is 45,000 strong—nearly double the size of Mexico's marine corps.

Guerrero produces more than 60 percent of Mexico's total opium output, and despite being a large producer of the narcotic, its consumption is nonexistent in the sierras, save for a small amount for toothache relief. It all goes north to supply the ever-increasing demand for heroin in the United States.

"We know the opium eventually does harm, but we can't ignore the demand, and we are so far removed from the death that we feel innocent enough," says Lopez. "We literally have no other option. For us it would be ridiculous not to cultivate poppies."

America's issues with heroin have been worsened significantly by the availability of pharmaceutical opiates, most notoriously oxycodone, nicknamed "hillbilly heroin." Seventy-five percent of regular American heroin users came to the drug through prescription medication, which becomes too expensive and difficult to get hold of for pain sufferers-turned-addicts, many of whom make the obvious move to cheap and readily available Mexican black tar.

And there's no need for users to buy on street corners in seedy parts of town, as Mexican cartels in the U.S. will now deliver directly to your door. The most successful illicit narcotics organization in history, the Sinaloa Cartel controls the North American narcotrafficking process all the way from manufacture to sale, in a heroin market worth more than $8 billion a year, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

In 2008, Mexico produced an estimated 38 metric tons of heroin; less than a decade later, Guerrero alone can export 150.

Guerrero's opium crop produces two harvests a year. The end of the dry season in March produces a concentrated opium gum, worth $1,000 per kilo, while the rainy season's product, gathered at the end of September, produces a greater quantity, but a more diluted paste, worth just $300 per kilo.

Most residents in the region will cultivate around five acres of poppies at a time, which yield a minimum of 20 kilos per year, generating an average annual income of $13,000 from the cultivation and sale of opium. For those who still farm fruit and vegetables, a ton of peaches (over 900 kilos) is worth around the same as a single kilo of opium.

The farmers themselves are a humble group, and see little of the huge profits reaped by the drug cartels from the sale of heroin. While a farmer can see as little as $5,000 for enough raw opium to manufacture a kilo of black tar, the street value of the same package on the streets of Chicago can reap an average of $80,000.

In the higher reaches of the sierras, the villages have no electricity or running water, the closest mobile signal is a four-hour drive, and the sharp relief blocks even long distance radio waves. Before opium poppies arrived in these villages, the traditional means of providing for families was to migrate to the U.S. and send money back. But today, as more deportees return to the sierras and President Trump promises crackdowns on illegal immigrants, opium has become the stabilizing factor in the local economy.

"The more Trump talks about cracking down on Mexicans, the more joy the deportees take in their work," grins Lopez.

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The opium harvest is a labor-intensive process, with each bulb giving up just a few grams.

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Overlooking the high sierras of Guerrero state, one of Mexico's most inaccessible regions. The local communities live entirely from the production and sale of opium.

Botanically speaking, opium paste is an ideal cash crop. The opium poppy is a hardy plant, resistant to changing weather, and a single pod produces more than a thousand seeds which can still be sown even after the opium has been extracted, exponentially increasing consecutive harvests.

Opium is also light. An entire harvest can be carried easily in a rucksack from remote hidden plantations on steep hillsides, while a ton of avocados, worth roughly the same, requires heavy machinery and good roads, neither of which are abundant in the high sierras.

On top of that, it's an enduring commodity. If a buyer is not found for a batch, it can be buried in the ground and stored indefinitely, while corn and peaches spoil quickly. Fruit and vegetables must also be transported to market; for the opium, the narcotraffickers come directly to the farmers.

The buyers are the only contact the farmers have with the narcotrafficking chain. These wiry young men who trade on behalf of the cartels are often natives of the sierras. A good knowledge of the mountains and cultural understanding with the locals are prerequisites for the job, and much of the commerce is done on foot.

Journeymen traders, the buyers catch public transportation from village to village through the badlands. Armed with just a pistol and bundles of cash, they negotiate with the farmers to fill their backpacks before descending to a cartel laboratory in one of the towns in the foothills, where 15 kilos of opium are made into a single kilo of heroin.

The cartel presence is not always welcomed in the sierras, and farmers won't do business with more than one narco buyer at a time for fear of negotiations turning violent. Although the Sinaloa Cartel controls the narcotrafficking chain from the laboratories to the street dealers, the high volume of opium produced there has resulted in a number of smaller gangs from mountain communities becoming active.

Of the 56 active drug cartels in Mexico today, 24 are based in Guerrero state alone. Los Rojos, Los Ardillos, Guerreros Unidos, Los Tequileros, and SIDA, to name a few, are all competing in the business of trafficking opium.

The situation has resulted in much violence. The more remote settlements have seen whole communities kidnapped within their villages and forced into slavery by gangs who steal entire harvests. Shootouts are common in the access towns to the sierra, where bullet-riddled sandbags of army outposts conquered by cartel enforcers litter the roads.

Most notoriously, 43 protesting students disappeared in 2014 at the hands of the Guerreros Unidos gang in the strategic town of Iguala, whose mayor was also the cartel's boss.

In addition to contending with gang violence, the farmers are under constant threat from Operation Condor, the joint mission of the Mexican army and marines to wipe out opium crops from the air using herbicides sprayed from low-flying aircraft. Having started as an aerial photography program to map uncharted areas of the sierra in 1974, Condor quickly became a government mission to destroy opium production on a large scale.

Helicopters and crop-dusting planes fly low over areas of opium cultivation identified by satellite photography, spraying paraquat dichloride, a viciously effective herbicide entirely banned in Europe, which indiscriminately destroys plant matter upon contact and is water-resistant within minutes of application. The scorched land can take years to recover from the substance's effects, and the chemical, which has been linked to the development of Parkinson's disease, is highly toxic to humans, and has no known antidote.

Guerrero communities whose villagers drink from water sources that run through sprayed fields have reported respiratory problems; liver, heart, and kidney failure; and in cases of prolonged exposure to contaminated substances, death.

"The government thinks of us as criminals, and treats us as a wartime enemy," complains Lopez, who says he has witnessed military planes spraying paraquat dichloride over areas known to contain natural water springs from which communities drink. "We are not narcotraffickers. We are just trying to feed our families."

Despite government efforts to control opium production in the mountains, the sierras are impossible to police. In the past two years, Lopez's farmers' union has established its own vigilante police force, which communicates the entry of any unknown persons into its mountain chains, and forcibly refuses access to any outsider who has not previously been granted

"EVERY MOUNTAIN VILLAGE IN GUERRERO PRODUCES OPIUM, AND OUR ENTIRE ECONOMY DEPENDS ON IT. BY THIS POINT, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK."

permission. For a journalist to enter, two months' notice and committee approval are required.

So inaccessible are these high mountain villages to the Mexican authorities that "El Chapo" Guzman was reported to have hidden out here, in the remote village of Corral de Piedra, following his 2015 tunneled escape from the Altiplano maximum-security prison.

Lopez says that despite government efforts to curb their opium production, the sierra residents will always win.

"We are in 60,000 square kilometers [approximately 37,000 square miles] of mountains, which we know better than any outsider," he says. "If it comes to guerrilla warfare, the Guerrerense are the baddest of Trump's 'bad hombres.' The government won't stand a chance."

■ ■ ■

UNDER constant threat of both government crop destruction and narco takeover, and vulnerable to hungry animals, Guerrero's opium fields are also expensive to cultivate.

"First you have the labor costs of preparing the land," Lopez explains. "Territory sprayed by the government is useless, so you must find a new patch of land and clear it by hand. The best plots to avoid detection are a two hours' walk into the sierra.

"If you have various fields, as most people do, then you must keep them small and separate. That way, if one is discovered, you don't lose your entire harvest. It's also a good idea to surround your opium crop with taller avocado and peach trees for camouflage.

"Once your crop is ready," Lopez continues, "it takes five men four days to harvest a single hectare, by which time, on top of the fertilizer, herbicides, and labor costs, you've already spent half your earnings from a batch of opium that hasn't yet been sold."

The farmers live a hand-to-mouth existence, using their earnings from the profitable dry season to last them the rest of the year, hoping that drug cartel activity in the sierras doesn't worsen so that they end up kidnapped in their own towns.

Guerrero is now North America's most murderous state, with about 60 murders per 100,000 residents annually—four times the Mexican national average—while rates of kidnapping, femicide, disappearance, and extortion are higher than any of the war zones on the northern border.

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Caught between federal antidrug policies and the suffering of the impoverished farmers, the Mexican government finds itself in an impossible position. The issue has become such a problem for Guerrero that last year the state governor, Héctor Astudillo, compared his region to Afghanistan.

"We are the same place," he told the Mexican national media. "Except we are one state and they are an entire country."

In the same breath, Astudillo informally floated the idea of legalizing and regulating the production of opium, a proposal that was ignored and ridiculed by the country's Federal Congress in Mexico City. The governor, however, remains firm, championing the idea across the state in his political visits.

Astudillo first came to office through the forced resignation of his predecessor following the scandal of the disappeared 43 students, and his first 100 days in office saw 734 homicides throughout the state. "If you can't beat them," he says, "at least find a way to tolerate them."

Jorge Hernández Tinajero, a founding member of the Collective for an Integral Drug Policy, an independent body which seeks an end to the decade-long drug war that has cost over 100,000 lives, is doubtful that regulating opium production is the silver bullet to the state's narcotics problem.

"On a global level we already have a surplus of medical opiates, and we don't see an increasing demand," he says from his office in Mexico City. "Of the 800 tons of medical morphine

AS GUERRERO'S OPIUM PRODUCTION GROWS EXPONENTIALLY BY THE YEAR, LOPEZ SAYS HE SEES NO END TO THE INDUSTRY IN HIS BELOVED MOUNTAIN VILLAGE.

that were produced last year, only 500 tons were consumed. If Mexico were to go into business as an opium-exporting country, it would find that shifting its product would be very difficult."

Arturo Lopez also admits that while legalization would put an end to much of the violence, moving away from selling product on the black market would ultimately affect his union's bottom line.

"We look at it in terms of profit," he says. "No one who can get a thousand dollars for selling a kilo of opium to a narco is going to sell it on the government for a quarter of that and then pay taxes on it. Ultimately it's better for us as a farmers' union if opium cultivation remains illegal…. We'll take our chances."

As Guerrero's opium production grows exponentially by the year, Lopez says he sees no end to the industry in his beloved mountain village.

"We live happy and peaceful lives up here, and as long as our union is strong, then we have no reason to fear," he says. "Most of us here don't even know what the opium is even used for. We just know it's valuable."

He plucks a bloodred petal from his maturing crop, and holds it against the fading light. Staring out over the rolling hills, he points out a group of children at the other side of the valley, playing soccer on the dirt road above the poppy fields.

"God help us when the younger generation finally works out they can smoke it straight out of the plant," he laughs. "That's when we'll really be in trouble."

Alasdair Baverstock is an award-winning foreign correspondent based in Mexico, and covers Latin America in print and video. You can see his work at alasdairbaverstock.com, or follow him @alibaverstock



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The entire community is expected to help in the harvest, but few have any idea of where their raw product ends up.



DREAM STATE

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Our March CyberCutie Rae Riley admitted to us she got really stoned and dreamed she was a fairy nymph traveling through a plastic green jungle and into a retro *Penthouse* parlor before cuddling into a claw-foot tub filled with mysterious white powder. We were all, "Holy shit! That sounds amazing. Want to go back?" Rae was more than fine to return to her happy place.

Photography: Gerald De Behr

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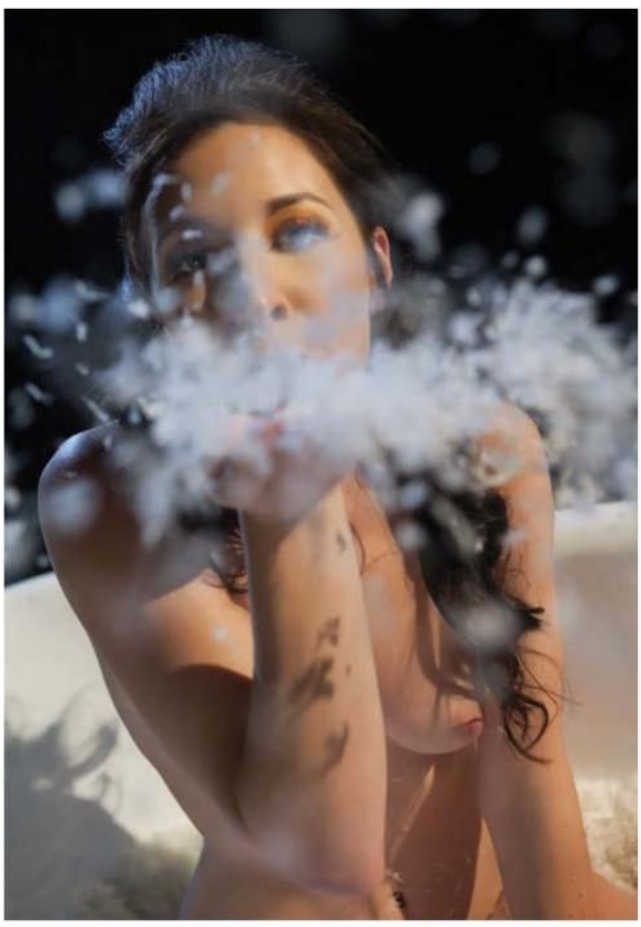




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Vital Stats: 34B-24-26; 27-years-old; 5'4"

Hometown: Los Angeles, California

What's the craziest thing you've done on camera?
I snuck onto a college campus and performed a live show on cam from an empty classroom. And I got caught!

What happened?
I was sitting on the teacher's desk and this guy walked in—I assume he was faculty—and I yelled at him as if he were the one interrupting me.

Why a classroom?
I was trying to think of something innovative, different, and exciting for my live show. Of course, this was back when cam girls were allowed to do live shows. This was my first time doing it live. After that, I did ten more public shows.

Some of your videos are pretty crazy. What would you be doing if you weren't in the adult industry?
When I was young, I wanted to be a coroner. I was really into *CSI*. I thought that examining a dead body, trying to figure out how they died, would be pretty cool.

You've been camming for five years. Do you have any desire to do anything else in the adult entertainment world?
I'm pretty introverted, so I feel good in my cam room. My fans and I take shots of whiskey, hang out, and get crazy. In my everyday life I'm much more subdued and introverted.

What made a shy girl like you want to start camming in the first place?
I was always very comfortable posting naked photos of myself. Whether they were private shots sent to a boyfriend or made public on my Tumblr, I just liked doing it. One day I came across another cam girl's blog and it all clicked. I knew camming would be perfect for me.

Find more of Rae Riley at https://profiles.myfreecams.com/RaeRiley or see more at Penthouse.com



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DR. KETAMINE

MEET THE DOCTOR BEHIND KETAMINE INFUSION THERAPY, A REVOLUTIONARY WAY TO GENTLY TRIP YOUR WAY OUT OF CLINICAL DEPRESSION.

BY JUSTINE FRANCES

BACK in 1964, Dr. Edward F. Domino was the first physician to test ketamine on a human being. It was two years after the anesthetic had been discovered and physicians wanted to determine its potency.

Now 93 and still running an active lab at the University of Michigan, Dr. Domino recently shared the story of ketamine's first trial with one of his admirers, psychiatrist Steven Levine, CEO of Actify Neurotherapies, a clinical organization that specializes in Ketamine Infusion Therapy. Treating depression with ketamine is revolutionary and achieving remarkable results. But when the two physicians met at a Prague medical conference last year, Dr. Domino recalled the drug's early days, when his testing focused on establishing ketamine's value as a surgical anesthetic.

"Please suspend your horror at the ethics of this," Dr. Levine tells me over the phone. "It was the early sixties and things were done much differently than now. By the way, you have to imagine [Dr. Domino] telling me this story with a rolled-up program in his hand, poking me in the stomach, while every other word that comes out of his mouth is 'goddamn.'"

Accompanied by an anesthesiologist, a young Dr. Domino tested ketamine on a prisoner. They injected the patient before surgery and began a rudimentary test of pain control: First, they squeezed the patient. Nothing. Then, they clamped his skin with a tool. Nothing. Searching for something more sensitive to try next, Dr. Domino instructed the anesthesiologist to pinch the patient's nipples. Still nothing. "Fine, grab his testicles!" Nope.

After the surgery, Dr. Domino asked the patient how he felt. "I'm good, Doc," he replied. "No pain at all. But it's the damnedest thing. That stuff you gave me made my balls blue!" With that, the patient whipped down his pants to reveal his swollen testicles.

Originally synthesized for use in veterinary medicine, ketamine is still widely used as an anesthetic. But it found its way outside the hospital, too. In the 1970s, West Coast trippers began using it recreationally for its disassociative, cosmic effects. During the rave culture two decades later, club kids turned liquid ketamine to powder and snorted it. Unlike Ecstasy or MDMA, ketamine hit hard and fast, often sending kids into a deep and brutal k-hole.



Dr. Steven Levine

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ACTIFY NEUROTHERAPIES

But now ketamine is helping people with clinical depression, including patients desperate for something to work after conventional antidepressants gave them little or no relief. I phoned Dr. Levine at his office in Princeton, New Jersey, to pick his brain about how ketamine operates, what the treatment involves, and where things stand generally when it comes to medicating depression.

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How did you become the founder of ten revolutionary clinics that practice Ketamine Infusion Therapy to treat depression?

The short answer is there's a book by Kurt Vonnegut called *The Sirens of Titan*. The main character ends up traveling around through space and time via this convoluted mechanism. He arrives in the future to a waiting crowd who want to know how he got there. His answer, to their delight, is, "I was a victim of a series of accidents, as are we all." [*Laughs*]

I certainly never set out to be a psychiatrist specializing in Ketamine Infusion Therapy, that's for sure. I went to medical school planning to be a surgeon for reasons that I can deal with in my own therapy sessions, and I really enjoyed the actual mechanics of surgery. However, when I started to put myself in the shoes of surgeons, they just weren't my people. That was not going to make me happy for a 40-year career. A few of my mentors were psychiatrists and it seemed like, independent of a disease or any kind of a treatment, if what we were talking about wasn't connecting to a person and somebody's story, then they weren't interested—and I could identify with that.

In so much of medicine, it's amazing hubris to think we actually know what we're talking about. What we're talking about is human suffering. That never changes, unfortunately. I went off into psychiatry and trained at Cornell, which is part of New York Presbyterian Hospital. What's unusual about that as a training program is that the emphasis is on talk therapy, not on medication. Typically, psychiatrists are the prescription writers and non-MDs wind up doing the therapy.

That never made sense to me. Why wouldn't the doctor prescribing the drugs also provide the therapy?

Exactly. Why break it up? I went off into practice doing a 50-minute "Tell me about your mother" approach to psychotherapy, but prescribing medicine at times because I had the pad and sometimes I needed to use it. However, this was an interesting time in psychiatric medication, because it was right around then that the STAR*D [Sequenced Treatment Alternatives to Relieve Depression] study came out. That was the biggest and best-designed depression file done to date. The study was worked on for multiple years, using thousands of patients, and essentially led people through a best-practice algorithm for depression treatment. STAR*D had four steps to success, with some sub-steps in there, but even if you followed all four steps, it still left one-third of patients untreated after a year of effort.

It was a pretty sobering look at psychiatric pharmacology. It's no wonder, because over the last 50 years there has been no innovation in the treatment of depression. Every medicine has been a rewarmed, repackaged "me-too" lookalike of something that already existed using this serotonin hypothesis of depression, which never held water in the first place. The field [of psychiatry] now acknowledges that having a "chemical imbalance" is bullshit, yet all the medicines were created on that hypothesis.

Wait, so having a "chemical imbalance" is medically untrue?

Yes. It's really an absurd thing, this idea that a person can have a deficit of serotonin and that if they take a certain medicine, their serotonin levels will go up and they will feel better. It doesn't make any sense. First of all, if it did, then anyone who took Prozac would feel better almost immediately. But we know that is not how [serotonin-based antidepressants] work. These medications can take weeks or months to work for a patient, if they even work at all. We still do not know for sure, but the more plausible reason that Selective Serotonin Uptake Inhibitors, or SSRIs, help some people is that the medicine does have an effect on the plasticity of the brain. SSRI medications increase proteins called neurotrophic factors, particularly one called BDNF [brain-derived neurotrophic factor], which helps when repairing some of the damage of depression. One thing we clearly know at this point is that depression is a neurodegenerative condition. It is structural damage—a structural change that happens. If anyone says that depression is all in one's head, then they are pretty much right.

If an SSRI works because it creates brain plasticity, or rewiring, then how does an antidepressant like Wellbutrin, which is dopamine-based, help fight depression?

Wellbutrin is super cool. We still don't know exactly how it works, but structurally Wellbutrin is what is known as a substituted cathinone. The best, most well-known, and widely used cathinone in the world is khat, which is a leaf that is chewed in Ethiopia and many other countries. Khat is a stimulant like Wellbutrin. Side note: The other popular cathinone used right now are those bath salts that you can order online and make people go insane. [*Laughs*]

"WHY DO WE SIT AROUND WITH OUR THUMBS UP OUR BUTTS USING INEFFECTIVE MEDICINE WHEN THERE IS THIS OTHER MEDICINE THAT TAKES EFFECT WITHIN HOURS AND IS SAFE?"

Wellbutrin is another example of an antidepressant that is a little bit different, yet still based on the monoamines hypothesis. Monoamines are major neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and epinephrine. Antidepressants started with the Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors, or MAOIs, which was an older class of medicine. Then in 1987 the SSRIs came along. The whole marketing spin was that SSRIs were just as good as MAOIs, but much safer, so even primary-care physicians could prescribe them. Great. And it's true that they are safer and produce fewer side effects, but they are not as effective for most people. We did not gain anything there.

What also started to happen when the STAR*D study came out was the rise of the repurposing of antipsychotic medication as antidepressants. Medicines such as Ablifly and Seroquel. They were a very small part of the pharmaceutical market, used for schizophrenia, but were being repurposed for bipolar disorder as the definition of this condition got twisted to meet the need for the medication. Lo and behold, these antipsychotic medicines were suddenly great antidepressants, and sold that way.

Of course, these medicines do help a lot of people and I don't want to imply that they don't, but if you look at the data for antipsychotics used for depression, in most studies patients improve based on the clinician's measures, but patient-rated quality of life measures are usually no better or worse than a placebo. These medicines have a lot of side effects, both short- and long-term. The weighing of risk versus benefit is a pretty tough calculation. I've never been too impressed with those drugs.

How did you make the connection between ketamine and depression treatment?

A woman who needed a second opinion walked into my office

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one day. She had the unfortunate yet common story of [having gone] through the ringer of every single antidepressant and antipsychotic, as well as shock therapy, to no avail. We spoke for a while, and she admitted to me that the one thing that made her feel better was taking cough medicine. The common ingredient in what she was taking was dextromethorphan. Now, some people abuse dextromethorphan. High school kids can get it over-the-counter, mix it with some juice, and drink enough to trip.

Rappers call it "lean."
Yes! [*Laughs*] She wasn't doing that, though. She was taking regular, cough-medicine-size doses and it was helping her mood. That made me very curious. What was it about dextromethorphan, or DXM, that could explain her observation, and what else was out there that shared any properties with dextromethorphan and had a research basis for depression?

As it turned out, a few things fit that description, including ketamine. And in 2010, a study looking at ketamine as a possible antidepressant—after studies in 2000 and 2006—had just published. As I read the papers, I questioned why we weren't using ketamine. What I read was pretty remarkable. A sad fact is that in depression research, if someone has previously tried an antidepressant and didn't respond to it, they will be excluded from the trial. Since depression research is industry-funded [by big pharmaceutical companies], they don't want to take the chance that results will look bad for their product. But [this new research included] people who had been depressed for decades and tried dozens of previous treatments. And despite the fact that no medical professional expected these patients to respond positively to any treatment, they were getting significantly better within hours of a single exposure to a fractional dose of a drug developed in the 1960s. That drug was ketamine.

I always thought of ketamine as an animal tranquilizer that was also used illegally as a gnarly party drug. Then a friend of mine had to have emergency surgery after a motorcycle accident and they gave her ketamine to knock her out. I was shocked! But apparently how you ingest ketamine can create a completely different result.
Exactly. The way it is ingested, the intention when you ingest it, the dose, the setting. Of course, ketamine as a club drug is a whole lot sexier than when used after a motor vehicle accident, but that's what it was intended for: anesthesia. The World Health Organization lists it as one of the most commonly-used medicines for surgery, trauma, pain, and burns.

But you were looking at it to help with something else.
Right. I was reading these medical papers and couldn't understand why we didn't think about using ketamine for depression before—if only for those patients who had tried every other drug! The dose that we use for depression cannot hurt somebody. If you think about that and weigh it against other medicines that may be FDA-approved but don't have great research behind them...in the meantime people are dying. Think about something like cancer. We are very willing to give people toxic treatments like chemotherapy because they have a lethal illness and without it are going to die. But the fact is people die of suicide at very high rates. Why do we sit around with our thumbs up our butts using ineffective medicine—with tons of side effects patients hate—when there is this other medicine that takes effect within hours and is safe? Why would we not think about using that? It really pissed me off.

How does Ketamine Infusion Therapy work? Is it similar to microdosing? How does the treatment last after you are off the drug and leave the doctor's office?



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ACITFY NEUROTHERAPIES

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Ketamine Infusion Therapy is different than microdosing in the sense that microdosing, as the name implies, involves sub-threshold doses too small individually to produce any noticeable effect, but that in the aggregate may have some benefit. The jury is still out. In the case of ketamine, you feel it. You have a disconnected, out-of-body experience. It's not a microdose—it's a true dose—but one way below that of anesthesia. What is really different about ketamine, compared with the Prozacs of the world, is that with the latter you have to take it every day. You must maintain a steady Prozac intake in order to get the benefit.

Now, with ketamine treatment, it's not as though you do it once and you're cured. But its effect lasts way beyond the time that the medicine is in your system. Ketamine is only present for a few hours, but that single dose can potentially last for a week or two. In the grand scheme, that's not that long, which is why we use more than one treatment. But it is pretty amazing. You have no medicine in your system, yet you are getting the benefits.

How is that possible?

Well, one answer to that is short and humble. I'm making an "I don't know" gesture, because we really do not quite understand why just yet. What studies have shown us is that if somebody had only a single treatment and they responded positively to that, then the results will last maybe a week or two. Subsequent studies looked at giving ketamine to patients in a series of treatments—specifically six over two weeks—which is much more durable. It can last from several weeks to several months. The treatment we give is three in the first week, two in the second week, then we start to taper off, doing one weekly. It depends on the individual. Everyone has different depression. The big idea is that we don't want to keep somebody medicated all the time. Instead the medicine goes in, does its thing, and the repairs are made.

"ITS EFFECT LASTS WAY BEYOND THE TIME THE MEDICINE IS IN YOUR SYSTEM. KETAMINE IS ONLY PRESENT FOR A FEW HOURS, BUT THAT SINGLE DOSE CAN POTENTIALLY LAST FOR A WEEK OR TWO."

Are pharmaceutical companies trying to create ketamine-like drugs?

Yes, in fact there are about ten drugs in the pipeline that are seeking to mimic ketamine. Most of neuroscience right now is devoted to figuring out how ketamine works [for depression]. What pharma is narrowing in on is the effects of the glutamate system, which is one part of a very rich mechanism. Glutamate is the most abundant chemical messenger in the brain and body. It's the major excitatory neurotransmitter. Elevated glutamate levels have been associated with brain damage. The classic example is Lou Gehrig's disease. It's thought that what underlies the damage of Lou Gehrig's is an elevated glutamate state. There are many ways to affect the glutamate system. One of our numerous receptors or docking stations is called the NMDA receptor. Ketamine blocks that receptor and it's thought that this sets off a chain of events that winds up having positive effects on neuroplasticity.

Up until 20 years ago, it was believed that your brain developed to a certain point and that's it. We now know that is not true. Humans maintain the capacity to heal damage, route around it, and form new connections. The theory is that when ketamine activates the glutamate system it can have a positive effect on repairing the damage of depression. Even though the drug doesn't stick around in your system, the repair lasts. Again, this is just one aspect of ketamine's mechanism. Furthermore, there is debate around this theory. Some argue that the key may not be the NMDA receptor but a different one called AMPA, but this doesn't matter for ketamine because we know it works. Though it does matter for the new drugs being developed.

Does ketamine only affect the glutamate system?

No, ketamine also has potent anti-inflammatory and immune-modulating properties. This is a really interesting frontier—not just in mental health, but across the world of medicine. There is also activity shown in the serotonin receptor. And there is the dissociative experience itself, as I mentioned, which for many people may be quite important.

Why do you think so many Americans are on antidepressants? Are psychiatrists just pill-pushers, or are we becoming more comfortable talking about mental illness?

This just my opinion, but I suspect it's partly diagnostic laziness with regard to the psychiatrist, and the other part may be along the lines of what you just said. We have reached a point in the history of mental illness where it is now more common and acceptable to talk about it openly. On the one hand, there are positives to that. When the stigma is lifted, people are more likely to seek help and treat their conditions. The downside is that this waters down the definition of depression. People will commonly say they are "depressed," but what they mean is that they are "bummed out." There is a huge difference between feeling down and clinical depression.

Depression is very specific. It lasts at least two weeks—usually much longer. It's a period of sustained low mood, suicidal thinking, changes in appetite, changes in sleep, social withdrawal. And the kicker is that it profoundly impacts a person's social or occupational functions.

Then, half the people I know on antidepressants don't need them.

One in six Americans take a medicine for a mental health condition. That is clearly higher than what can be seen in the population as diagnosable mental illness.

One in six? That seems insane!

It is insane. It's a problem. It says something about us as a culture and a people. If you don't like the way things are going in life then—*hey!*—just get a pill for it. Unfortunately, there are plenty of doctors who are more than happy to prescribe that pill unnecessarily.

Have you used Ketamine Infusion Therapy for anyone suffering from other mental illnesses such as PTSD, or is it only used for depression?

Before I began testing out the therapy in 2010, my first stop was to talk to a whole bunch of anesthesiologists to make sure what I was thinking wasn't crazy. Every one of them approved the idea, but even then, I was very specific about who I treated. Over time, as research has come out about ketamine and OCD, PTSD, and fibromyalgia, we have expanded our practice to treat those conditions. We have treated over 2,000 patients. The Mayo Clinic honors us, as does the Cleveland Clinic, New York's Mount Sinai, on and on. We are no longer going it alone. The research evidence is there.

Justine Frances is a writer based in Los Angeles. She is obsessed with neurology, pharmacology, and wishes she had gone to medical school.

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FISTED

BY JENNY NORDBAK

I'VE spent so much time around people with wild fetishes that sometimes I feel like my own tastes are a little boring. Mostly, I fantasize about penetration in all its forms: pressing my finger into a warm, wet pussy… sliding my strap-on ever so slowly into someone's ass…wrapping my own lips around a thick, hard cock and feeling it penetrate my throat.

Those are the images that get me off. Once, I even got to try urethral sounding and stick a metal rod into a guy's dick. I thought I had reached nirvana when he let me replace the metal sound with my finger. After that, it seemed as though I had explored just about every avenue of my penetration fetish.

Darling Lisa proved me wrong.

Lisa was a professional submissive at the dungeon where I worked. Her classic Japanese beauty made her look like a porcelain doll, innocent and pure, but she was one of the most unashamedly sexual creatures I've ever encountered.

It wasn't uncommon to come back to the dressing room after a session and find her nearly naked and masturbating on the couch. She had long, dark, silky hair that flowed over her shoulders and across her creamy, pale skin. She had the most naturally perfect set of tits I've ever seen, perky and full. Lisa wanted to be touched and kissed constantly, and because everything about her was soft and inviting, she was a continual temptation.

One innocent Thursday evening, I was doing some work for my day job in the dressing room when she came charging in after a session, horny and begging for release.

"My client just got me so turned-on, but I didn't want to break the rules, so I didn't let him do anything. Now I *need* to get off. Please, Mistress Scarlett. Don't leave me like this."

She threw herself down on the couch and started to play with her clit over her lacy white panties. I cocked an eyebrow at her and teased, "Looks to me like you can manage on your own."

"Nooo! Please. I need to feel you inside me."

She knew those were the magic words that I couldn't resist. She parted her thighs in invitation, whimpering desperately.

I glanced at my watch, shrugged, and sat down between her legs, stripping off her panties. I let her keep rubbing her clit as I gently parted her pussy lips with my fingertips, barely touching her impossibly soft skin. She thrust her hips hard against me, silently begging me to plunge into her, but I wasn't going to give her the instant release she was primed for. An orgasm is always better when you have to work for it.

Instead, I slid my middle finger far enough into her slippery heat to reach her G spot, but instead of rubbing it, I pressed just hard enough for her to feel it.

I quickly added a second and third finger, spreading her deliciously soft folds and making her moan wildly. I pushed my fingers in and out of her in time to the rhythm of her thrusting hips.

"Oh, yes, Mistress! Harder! Fuck me harder!"

I obliged, pushing deeper and harder into her tight pussy, while watching the movement of her fingertips quicken on her clit. She seemed to be getting close.

I spread the three fingers that were buried within her, knowing she would feel the stretching pressure.

"More…" she begged.

My fingers weren't strong enough to spread any farther because she was so tight, so I tried to work my pinky finger in with the others.

She went wild when she felt what I was doing.

"Fuck yes, Mistress. Fist me."

"Seriously?" I asked, surprised. It didn't feel like I could fit my fist in there, but I knew it might be possible. I was dripping wet at the thought.

"Please, please, please…fist me! Fist me hard!"

I needed no further invitation. I pulled my hand back, delighted at how slippery my fingers felt from her arousal. When I pushed it back into her, it was with all five fingers pressing forward together. She felt impossibly tight, but I kept thrusting in and out until I had reached the widest part of my hand. I was ready to work it in slowly, but with a rough thrust of her hips, she forced it past the resistance. My whole fist was now inside of her and it was torturously erotic.

In classic Lisa fashion, she pursed her perfect Cupid's bow lips together for an instant, savoring the sensations, before opening her mouth and letting loose a stream of

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I WASN'T GOING TO GIVE HER THE INSTANT RELEASE SHE WAS PRIMED FOR. AN ORGASM IS ALWAYS BETTER WHEN YOU HAVE TO WORK FOR IT.

filthy, barely coherent language. She looked like the picture of innocence, but the girl could talk dirty.

"Fuck my dirty whore cunt, Mistress! Own me. Use me. I've never been so full. You're so deep inside me! Oh, God, yes! Fill my slut hole and ruin me for anyone else! Fist me! Fist my pussy harder! Harder! Make me come all over your fist!"

She groaned deeply and came. I could feel her pussy pulsing tightly around my hand, squeezing out every last ounce of pleasure. I gave her a few moments to catch her breath before slowly withdrawing my hand.

"Thank you, Mistress!" she grinned, searching for some clothes before she got in trouble.

The intercom on the wall crackled to life: "Scarlett, your client is here."

I sighed.

"Please tell that worthless piece of shit I'll be there when I'm ready," I responded sweetly.

Lisa giggled in delight, "He's into humiliation?"

"Yep."

"Want me to come with you? We can make out and ignore him."

"Sounds perfect."

Jenny Nordbak is a retired dominatrix and author of The Scarlett Letters: My Secret Year of Men in an L.A. Dungeon.

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SHEER HOTNESS

Hosiery has always been a symbol of femme fatale sexuality. For centuries, stockings were made from silk and only the upper crust could get their manicured paws on a pair. That changed in the 1920s when synthetic fabrics arrived. Women loved the look so much some even painted lines on the backs of their legs during the nylon-rationing of World War II. No need for that here. Please enjoy as these two panty-hoes try to fuck each other out of their stockings.

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HOT LINES

BY LEAH MCSWEENEY

MENTAL HELL

Hi Leah, I recently started listening to Improper Etiquette and it has changed my life! I know it sounds corny, but it has opened parts of me that I thought I needed to hide to not be "too much" for others—listening to you speak so openly about your sexuality, being a single mom but not letting that define you, and most of all talking openly about your sobriety and mental health.

I'm 27 years old and a single mom to a beautiful 8-year-old boy; unfortunately the baby daddy is an asshole. I've always struggled with depression and anxiety, and I was officially diagnosed at 16. But after having my son, and with the baby daddy coming in and out of our lives, my depression got worse and I turned to drinking. I hid it for a really long time, but the past couple of years it's become obvious to others that I like to drink. I finally got on medication about three years ago for my depression/anxiety, but it was highly frowned upon by baby daddy and my family, so it took a long time for me to reach out for help.

Having mental illness has made me feel like I'm crazy at times, and I feel like it's something I need to hide. It's gotten pretty bad, but since listening to you I've decided to stop drinking. The problem is, I don't feel like I can share it with anyone because in the past it's been used against me in court.

How did you finally decide that you needed to stop drinking, and from day one, what did that look like? Secondly, how have you maintained your sobriety, especially when you're required to go to social events where alcohol is served? Again, I love you for being a badass bitch! I feel like you are the best example of what my best me can look like.—Annaliza

My journey into sobriety started at age 15, when I went to my first of many rehabs. But I didn't finally put down a drink until many years later, at the age of 27. I was empty inside. It's a hard feeling to describe to someone who doesn't have an addiction problem. So if you do, then I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. It's like waking up and you are in hell every day. The world is happening and moving around you and you are in quicksand. I tried everything except sobriety. I saw psychics and healers, I got colonics and went on cleanses. I hired a personal trainer, fasted, went to a therapist, tried switching to wine only, and drinking a glass of water between each drink. Everything except abstinence from booze.

Finally, one day after work heading home on the train, I had a complete spiritual experience (I'm not sure what else to call it). Maybe it was my brain going into survival mode, but I like to think it was more of a divine intervention. I had an out-of-body experience and I saw my child and her dad, but I wasn't there. I saw my mother and father, brother and sister. But I was gone. And I knew at that moment that if I drank again I might not live to my next birthday. It was the Universe giving me a major warning sign.

I made a phone call to a friend who was sober and I was taken by another friend to a 12-step program. I've stayed booze-free since then (not anywhere near perfectly or always sanely, but I have not picked up a drink).

I have maintained this in one very simple way: No matter how shitty things get or how bad I want to escape, I do not drink. Sometimes I go to AA, yoga, acupuncture, or ice skating. Sometimes I fuck a dude who I know is a psycho, smoke a pack of cigarettes, stay up all night watching true murder shows. Whatever I need to do, I do it. But I don't drink. My kid needs me sober. If I stay sober then I stay hopeful.

Recently I started smoking weed and it led me into other things, and into a bad, bad depression. Now I am counting days again in a 12-step program. And honestly it feels fucking awesome. Feels even better this second time around.

Your kid needs you as straight as possible. I'm sure once you put down the booze you will feel less depressed. Alcohol is a depressant and physiologically messes with our brain chemistry. I promise your life won't get worse by quitting booze. It will only get better. And my advice is to look up a local 12-step program near you. It has saved me.

I truly wish you all the best. I hope you make the choice to reclaim your life and your happiness.

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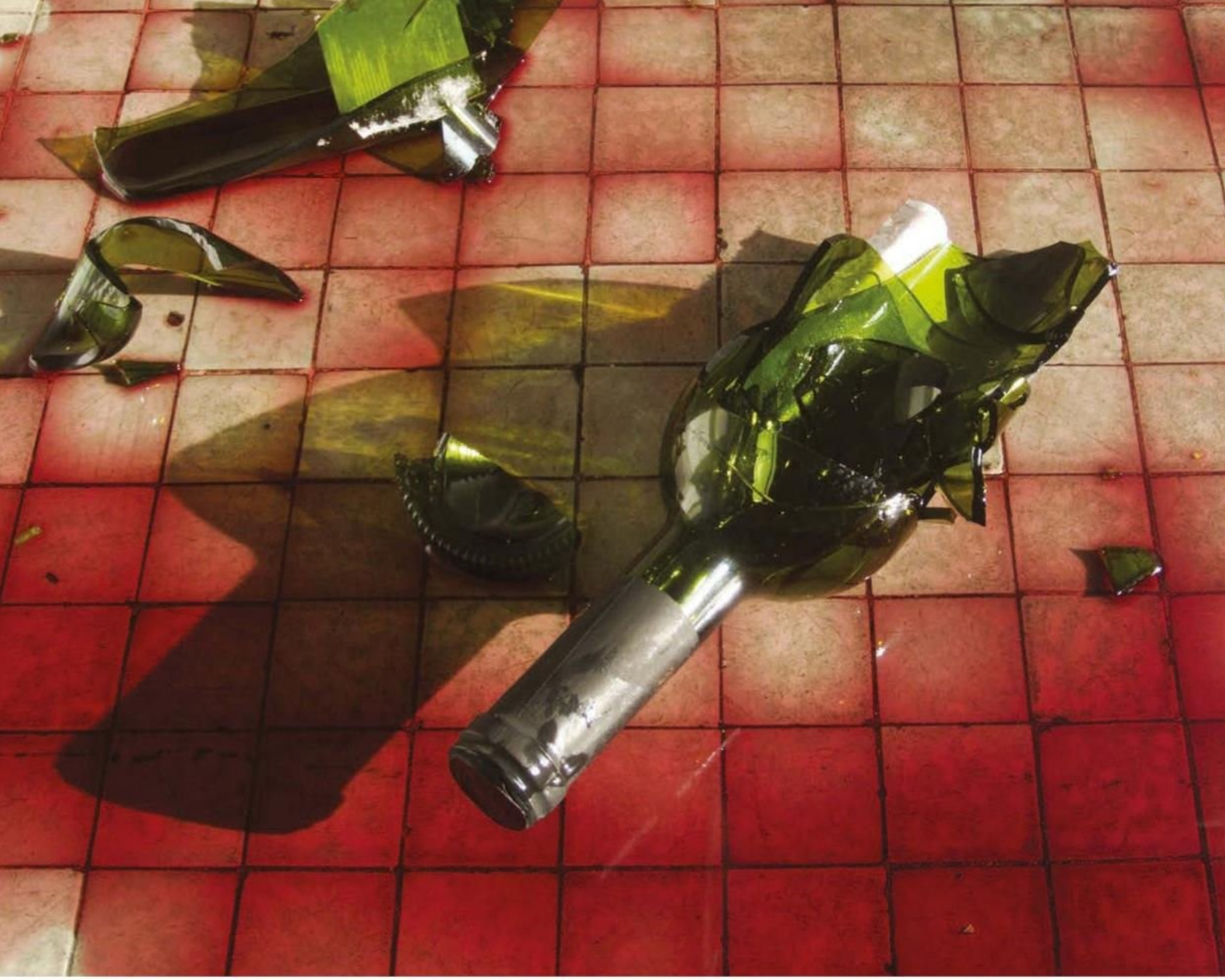


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY HORUS2017

SOMETIMES I GO TO AA, YOGA, ACUPUNCTURE, OR ICE SKATING. SOMETIMES I FUCK A DUDE WHO I KNOW IS A PSYCHO, SMOKE A PACK OF CIGARETTES, STAY UP ALL NIGHT WATCHING TRUE MURDER SHOWS. WHATEVER I NEED TO DO, I DO IT. BUT I DON'T DRINK. IF I STAY SOBER I STAY HOPEFUL.

FLESH FOR FANTASY

Leah, I'm a 36-year-old divorced dad of two. I am in a relationship. I love her, and I can definitely see a future with her. Lately, I've been having fantasies about a threesome. I never really had this when I was married.

Our sex life is good. I can basically do anything I want with her. But I keep coming back to wanting a threesome. I know she would do it, but I fear that, mentally, it would not be something that excites her. There's even the potential that it would make her feel bad. Do I ask her and try to talk her into it? Or do I just table it, knowing that she'll be uncomfortable?

If I didn't have feelings for her I would just say fuck it and go for it. But I do and don't want to mess up a potential future. What do you think?—Scott

Okay, let me put this real plain and simple to you: If you love her, and if you know a threesome would be something that not only wouldn't excite her but might make her feel bad, do you really love her? Why don't you keep your fantasies just what they are—fantasies. I mean, I have lots of fantasies that would make people feel bad. Like, a million of them. But I don't act on them. Like today, when this bitch cut me in line at Starbucks, I had a fantasy of throwing a scalding hot latte on her. But I didn't do it. Hope that helps!

Leah McSweeney is founder and CEO of Married to the Mob clothing line and cohost of the podcast Improper Etiquette, with hip-hop radio personality Laura Stylez.

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AFTER A DAY OF STUPID...

OUR MONTHLY SEARCH FOR STUFF THAT WON'T DENT YOUR IQ.

THANKS to cable channels like Animal Planet and National Geographic, *Nature* on PBS, and even the occasional theatrical release (*March of the Penguins* hit big in 2005, raking in $127 million), you don't have to head for parts unknown to spend time with cool animals. Similarly, if conservation's your thing, you have a bunch of publications, including *Sierra, Orion,* and *Nature Conservancy,* to catch you up on efforts to preserve land, maintain ocean habitats, and—no big whup—keep the planet from incinerating.

But your options don't stop there. And since we like to dig a little in this column, we unearthed some fantastic books and podcasts that also go green. The former are worthy heirs to early nature classics *Walden* and *My First Summer in the Sierra,* by Henry David Thoreau and John Muir respectively. As for podcasts, audio is a natural for earthly exploration, what with calls of the wild, birdsong, crashing waves, and so on.

Read on, listen up, and to quote Mahatma Ghandi, be the change you wish to see in the world.

DESERT SOLITAIRE **(Edward Abbey, 1968)**
They called him Cactus Ed. A prickly, heavy-drinking visionary raised in small-town Pennsylvania, Abbey spent two years as the lone park ranger at Arches National Park in southeast Utah canyonland. A decade later, he published an environmental masterpiece distilling his experience, busting on rapacious developers, and rallying America's nascent green movement. The book celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Pop open a beer (Ed would approve) and check out his rowdy, ornery hymn to sagebrush and rock.

WINTER: NOTES FROM MONTANA **(Rick Bass, 1991)**
Arguably America's best living nature writer, Bass grew up in Houston and worked as a petroleum geologist before radically changing his life. Always interested in nature and wildlife, he moved to the remote Yaak Valley in northwest Montana with his girlfriend and two dogs. This brilliant, wonderfully written book captures their first winter in a valley of 30 people, no electricity, and the Dirty Shame Saloon. Bass walked in snow for the first time. He cut a shitload of firewood. He had close encounters with elk, bobcats, moose, wolves, grizzlies. He got to know rugged neighbors, including Tom Oar, destined for *Mountain Men* fame on the History Channel. *Winter* puts the Yaak in your blood.

THE WILD PLACES **(Robert Macfarlane, 2007)**
Macfarlane is a U.K. version of Rick Bass—at the top of the nature-writing game. A 41-year-old Scot who teaches at Cambridge, he helped recharge the English tradition of landscape writing. Leader of a literary movement that's been dubbed the New Nature-Writing, this erudite adventurer seeks out the gnarliest, most remote corners of the archipelago (England, Scotland, Ireland). He visits a rugged Welsh island, a vast moor, a mountaintop, roughing it, hiking, exploring. His goal? To generate a new U.K. map, one without roads, its coordinates determined by wildness.

SAY GOODBYE TO THE CUCKOO **(Michael McCarthy, 2009)**
Endlessly fascinating, this book, by a top environmental journalist, raises the planetary alarm by focusing on English birds—specifically those McCarthy calls "spring-bringers." Every year, millions of epic fliers—cuckoos, swallows, swifts, house martins—migrate back and forth between England and Africa. Their numbers are in scary decline. Full of remarkable facts (swifts eat, sleep, and screw in the air; they almost never touch ground), *Say Goodbye* has the author hitting the trail in every chapter, searching habitats for birds, introducing experts who have made the study of individual species their life's work.

H IS FOR HAWK **(Helen Macdonald, 2014)**
Winner of multiple awards, this book tells the story, in

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language that glows like a raptor's eyes, of a woman who tries to heal herself by training a goshawk. In mourning after her dad dies, Macdonald, a veteran falconer, buys a captive-bred hawk she calls Mabel and brings it into her English home, then out into fields and woods. "Bulkier, bloodier, deadlier, scarier," she writes of this breed. "A reptile. A fallen angel. A griffon," she writes of Mabel. You learn a lot about hawks, falconry, and the English natural world in *H,* and it sharpens your sight—though not to the rifle-scope level of a big, lethal goshawk.

URBAN WILDLIFE PODCAST

Philadelphia-based reptile expert Billy Brown and birder Tony Croasdale (onetime singer for punk band R.A.M.B.O.) explore critters of the city, from New York terrapins to London scorpions to Shanghai birds. They interview experts and amateurs with stories to tell, and cover their own urban adventures. Harpy eagles eating feral cats, anyone?

OUTSIDE/IN

A favorite of those who swear by nature podcasts, this show, from New Hampshire public radio and host Sam Evans-Brown, offers a range of topics like threats from invasive species and the unintended human costs of clean energy, to wildlife segments (vultures, beavers), to the complex ethics of high-risk rescues in remote wilderness areas.

COSTING THE EARTH

A thoughtful, intrepid, sharply reported offering from England's BBC Radio, this podcast tackles topics such as the epidemic of wildfires, cruise-ship pollution, sea-level rise in the Solomon Islands, and saving Indonesia's rainforest. Challenging accepted wisdom, reporting on progress, it focuses on the interface between human life and the environment.

EYES ON CONSERVATION

Produced by a team that also films wildlife documentaries, this podcast features conversations with experts in wildlife biology, environmental justice, and conservation. Recent topics? The impact of plastic refuse. How condors help locate corpses in Southwest canyons. Two women who tracked salmon migration on horseback, from the Pacific coast to Idaho. New research is featured; shows end with ways for listeners to help.

SEA CHANGE RADIO

A show revolving around sustainability, the Sea Change podcast, led by host Alex Wise, interviews experts in the field (Bill McKibben, Paul Hawken), and does so weekly. In two recent episodes, we met a Hawaii-based bike maker who uses bamboo for frames, and the CEO of a San Francisco company whose "Fitbit for the planet" measures air pollution.

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LONG HAIR DON'T CARE

This mysterious model preferred to remain anonymous, so we had to imagine her backstory. After much debate, we came to the conclusion that her parents were Marlon Brando and a mermaid. We respect her need for anonymity. We guess that's how it goes when your father was a famous actor and your mother was born in a coral reef.

Photography: Inna Truu

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CANNABIS CANDY

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF LUXURY EDIBLES

OLD FASHIONED GUMDROPS by Lord Jones • $45 ▲

These all-natural gumdrops are so delicious you'll want to scarf down the whole box. (Don't. You'll end up curled in a ball, rocking back and forth in your backyard.) Lord Jones went all-out on these, with imported European fruit essences and the finest bud Southern California has to offer. Each flavor comes in different doses, including a 5:1 CBD: THC mix, as well as pure CBD gummies. **lordjonesbrand.com**

DARK CHOCOLATE ESPRESSO CHEWS by Lord Jones • $30 ▶

These scrumptious, single-serve hard candies are packed with 15mg of THC in either indica or sativa. (That's how much we like these—we used the word "scrumptious.") The THC chocolates are only available in California, but the potent CBD chews can be shipped worldwide. Cannabis is the new everything. **lordjonesbrand.com**



CAKEBALLS by Elbe's Edibles • $40
It's unfair that these cakeballs are bite-sized. But like with most high-end meals, it's about the beauty, not the breadth. We are gay for the soft chai cake center and spiced buttercream frosting. If we were foodies, we would purse our lips like Brett Michaels and do that thing Italians do when they really love their pasta. **elbesedibles.com**



LUXURY MACARONS by Madame Munchie • prices vary
Madame Munchie specializes in a variety of high-end cannabis cookies, but we vote for their specialty flavored macarons, especially Grilled PB&J, Green Gold (pistachio butter and honey), and Tropical Jungle (chocolate ganache and banana puree). Madame Munchie's marvelous marijuana macarons melt in your mouth. Try repeating that ten times after eating one. **madamemunchie.com**



TO WHOM IT MAY CANNABIS CHOCOLATES by The Art of Edibles • $30-$80
This luxury brand of chocolates tops the charts on flavor alone. We recommend the All Four One box, which includes all four flavors—Hazelnut Butter Truffle, Cherry Cayenne Bonbon, Smoked Almond Butter Truffle, and Hazelnut Brandy Bonbon—at the dosage of your choice. How high do you wanna get? **theartofedibles.com**

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DOUBLE FISTING

THE LATEST CONCOCTIONS IN WEED-INFUSED REFRESHMENTS



LEGAL SPARKLING TONICS by Mirth Provisions • $10-$25 per bottle
MONTI IPA BEER GLASS by Sempli • $55 (two-pack)
Legal tonics are not for kids. First, they are full of THC. Second, they are made from all-natural grown-up flavors like lemon, ginger, mint, pomegranate, and real cranberry juice (the heavy-duty natural kind). Using a CO_2 extraction process, Mirth only works with the best plants to provide a consistent high with every product. All flavors come in 20mg, 40mg, or 100mg bottles, and there's a dosage meter on the side of each one. **mirthprovision.com; sempli.com**

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SPARKLING CANNABIS WATER
by Keef • $8 per bottle
Lightly flavored and sugar-free, these naturally flavored sparkling-water drinks are the perfect alternative to booze or sugary cannabis edibles. We don't know a single pot-smoking woman who'd say no to this zero-calorie beverage, which comes in blood orange and lemon. And at 10mg per bottle, she won't be talking drivel. **keefbrands.com**





CDB HEMP SODAS by Cannabinoid Creations • $28 (four-pack)
Anyone in the cannabis industry will swear up and down how *amazing* CBD is. Their drum-beating may be annoying as shit, but they aren't lying. CBD—the non-psychoactive cannabinoid—is the true magic of the cannabis plant, providing pain relief, cerebral stimulation, and relaxation, not to mention being cancer-fighting. Both THC and CBD work best together (it's called "the entourage effect"), but when extracted using CO_2, CBD solo can fill your body with goodness. Plus, it's approved to ship nationwide. The company went wild on their soda flavors—Cartoon Cereal Crunch and High Tide HoneyDew Melon anyone?—but we love their classic Ginger Ale. **cannabinoidcreations.com**

LOW-CAF ORGANIC EVENING GREEN TEA or YUNNAN BLACK TEA by ViPova • $6 for a box of 16 teabags



When we Googled "Is tea feminine?" it led to a slew of message boards where faceless avatars debated whether or not drinking tea was just for the ladies. We quickly gave up on the question because it was dumb and we wanted some tea. The Green Tea packs 50mg of Scandinavian full-spectrum hemp oil and has no dirty weed aftertaste. **vipova.com**



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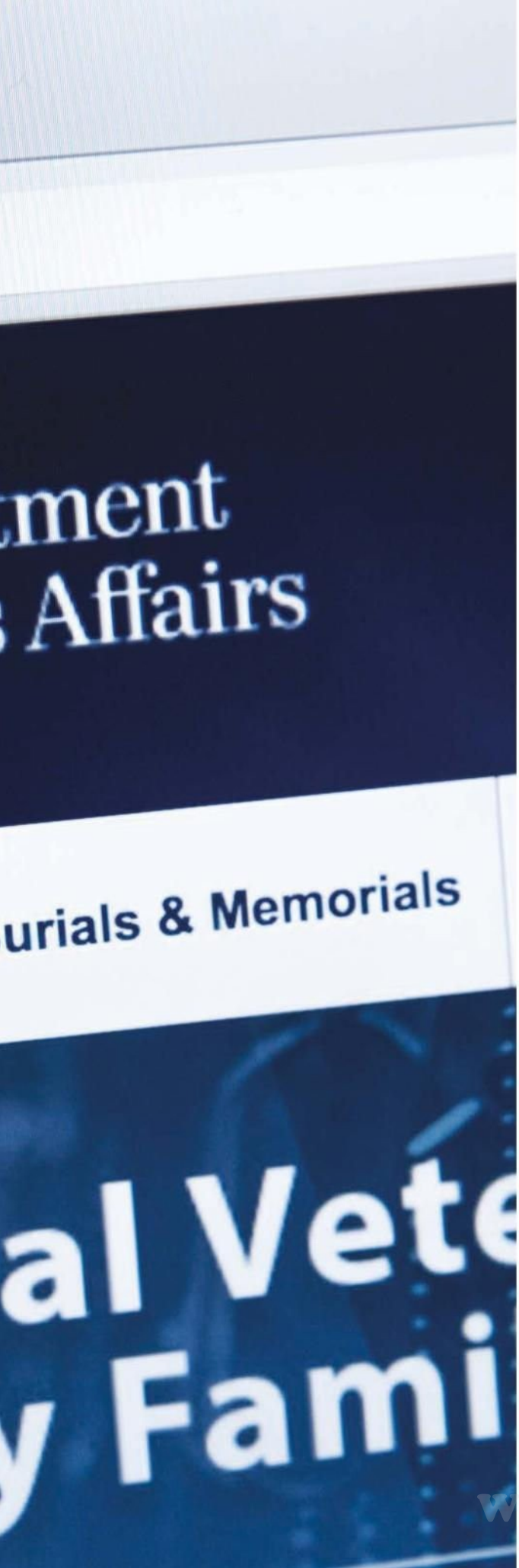


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THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE

MANY SERVICEMEMBERS DON'T REALIZE THERE ARE REWARDS BEYOND BLOWING SHIT UP.

BY MATT GALLAGHER

LET'S talk brass tacks. The rub. The skinny. The straight dope. The benefits, yo.

Yes, the military's an excellent place for young (and young-ish) hard-chargers and gung-hos to make a difference, to put their ideals into practice, to serve their nation, and, of course, to blow shit up with big-ass guns.

These are the usual reasons trotted out when people are asked why they joined up, and they are good reasons. Like many readers, I lived it, loved it, sometimes miss it, sometimes don't, and know it'll always be a fundamental part of who I am going forward.

I especially miss the blowing-shit-up-with-big-ass-guns part. There's nothing in this world like letting a Mark 19 rip….

But there are other reasons servicemembers enlist. There are other reasons they stay in, too, past their initial contract. These aren't hidden reasons, exactly. More like layered, subtextual reasons. The benefits: medical, financial, college, all that jazz. They matter, and they matter a lot.

2018 America seems hell-bent on returning workers to the labor underclass of the nineteenth century. At this rate, the American military might well be the last place where the word "pension" is a real goal and not a cruel joke.

The military is a bureaucracy, though, and like any bureaucracy, navigating it can be a maze. Many—too many—servicemembers and veterans don't know what they're entitled to and what they've earned through their service. Through my work and travels as a veteran-writer, and a few years working for a veterans' national nonprofit organization, I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "I wish I'd known about that earlier!" (often accompanied by a few F-bombs for effect).

So. What exact benefits did servicemembers and vets most appreciate? Which ones do they wish they'd learned about earlier? I asked some folks to share their wisdom.

Stephen, retired Master Sergeant, U.S. Air Force
"Without a doubt, the VA Home Loan. I don't how I didn't know about it earlier, but it was my wife who pointed me to it a year out [from retirement]. It was huge, letting us direct the money saved for our post-military home to funds for retirement and our kids' college. And can I say the VA was pretty good to deal with for this? I know. I couldn't believe it either."

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I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY TIMES I'VE HEARD, "I WISH I'D KNOWN ABOUT THAT EARLIER!" (OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY A FEW F-BOMBS FOR EFFECT).

David, former Specialist, U.S. Army
"I didn't know I qualified for VA medical health care. No one told me during TAP [transition assistance program]. I thought you had to do twenty years and get full retirement for it. I got out after four years. But because of our combat tour to Iraq, I do get VA medical. It's not good but it's better than the shit I had before. The mental health program at my VA has helped…. I still can't believe no one at TAP told us this. Those two years [before finding out about qualifying for VA care] were fucking hard."

Kate, active Sergeant, U.S. Army National Guard
"This is probably an obvious one, but the post-9/11 G.I. Bill is amazing! I've been able to go back to school and have my books and housing all covered. It's crazy to me that more of us [veterans] don't use it. I know school's not for everybody, but this is here. We earned it. Set yourself up for success. Though I have some friends who aren't using it so they can save it for their kids, someday. That's amazing they have that [transferability] option."

Maria, former Major, U.S. Army
"Not sure this counts as a benefit exactly, but when I was a captain and thinking about getting out, DOD [Department of Defense] was offering cash bonuses to extend. $30,000 for four more years in my subject field [transportation]. I weighed the pros and cons with my family, of course, and ultimately decided to do it. It allowed me to keep serving, and when I ended up separating four years later, my résumé was that much stronger for civilian employers.

"That's something I think more young people should know when considering the military. It's not all infantry and tanks. A lot of these career fields do transfer over to the civilian world. Mine did. Day one of my civilian job, I was 33 years old but had more experience and subject-matter knowledge than people ten years older, who'd been with this company for twenty years. It's not just about patriotism. There are practical benefits, too, that help us as individuals, and help communities as a whole, from what we've learned and know."

Glen, former Lance Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps
"You mean other than being a Marine the rest of my life? [*Makes woofing sound to signify his Devil Dog-ness*] Free dental, I guess. They fixed my teeth. Not an easy fix. I looked gnarly before. Like a wombat or some shit. Now I got that straight-teeth shine."

Terance, active Ensign, U.S. Navy
"I just joined the Navy myself, but I grew up a military brat. Both parents were in. I swore I'd never be like them…but after college, I was like, Now what? The job market out there is crazy. And my dad, he retired from the military—I'm looking at him, mid-forties, already on a second career, getting a retirement check every month. It's a hard life, but it's a good life. A fulfilling life. And my dad told me when I commissioned, be smart, work hard, and the Navy will look after you. No Fortune 500 Company does that. They may say it, but they don't mean it. The Navy really means it."

By no means are the benefits mentioned above comprehensive. I'd encourage any servicemembers, veterans, or family members reading this to look into what's available to you or yours. Whatever it is, it's been earned. Utilize it. Check out www.military.com/benefits and www.explore.va.gov for more information.

Matt Gallagher is a U.S. Army veteran of Iraq and the author of the novel Youngblood (Atria/Simon & Schuster).

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PROSPERITY

A SERIES OF ARGUMENTS AGAINST STUFF THEY TOLD US TO BELIEVE IN.

BY JOE DEROSA

"Reach for the stars."—*Anonymous (but definitely a dick)*

AH, the sweet smell of success. Hath thy nostrils been graced by this succulent aroma? If so, please describe it to me. Because aside from owning almost every videogame console from the eighties, I've never gotten a whiff of it. My apartment is rented, my practical car is nowhere near being paid for, and my bank account balance often falls somewhere between *Oh shit* and *Fucking Christ*. Still, I'm well enough off that I haven't yet had to pawn my ColecoVision, so I can't complain. The money is usually there when I need it.

But what about that *real* money? That "I didn't buy the new Nintendo, I bought Nintendo" (or at least stock in Nintendo) money?

I want funds that ferment, turning from gaggles of luscious grapes into quarts of thirst-quenching wine. But why stop there? I want an Audi for spring, a Ferrari for fall, and a Porsche, Bentley, and private tour bus for the rest of the year. I'll keep going. I want a house on a private lake, with a duplicate house on the opposite side of the lake, so when I swim across my lake I don't have to swim back to my original house. You dig? I want it all. But I'll never have it.

For starters, I'm not business-minded. I looked at my purchase of a French *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* poster as an investment. Also, I don't know how to properly ration my money (please refer back to the terms "ColecoVision" and "Nintendo," in addition to the movie poster line). Third, I'm not a visionary. I have no concept of laser focus or the ultimate goal. Grandiose ideas come to me, sure. But it doesn't take much to throw me off the path. Had I been working in Tesla's lab, the announcement of a local bar's Jäger Bomb happy hour would have prevented me from participating in the discovery of the alternating current. It's just how I'm wired, if you'll excuse the pun.

If I'm being honest, though, I'm okay with living the regular life. Despite the fact that I work in show business, live in Hollywood, and am completely surrounded by, for lack of a better term, utter whores, I don't have stars in my eyes. And that's a good thing. I realize the quest for prosperity has brought us many an invaluable asset, from flight to fusion to frozen food. But it's also created a lot of raging assholes.

The only thing I remember from the 2016 Summer Olympics is the Ryan Lochte controversy. In short, the decorated medalist possibly vandalized a gas station and allegedly lied about being robbed at gunpoint. He was then suspended from swimming for ten months (a gift if you ask me—like when you fuck up in high school and they punish you by making you stay home for a week).

But the American public couldn't believe their ears when they heard about Lochte's antics. Everybody just couldn't comprehend that another goddamned celebrity acted like a dumb fucking schmuck. What's the surprise here?

People always wonder: What's the secret to success? The answer is simple: being a self-serving piece of shit. Celebrity scandals are frequent because being a celebrity means, essentially, being at boss-level. If you wanna be at the top, you gotta work your way to the top. And that's a dirty, dirty job: plotting, manipulating, scheming, casting aside friends, ignoring family, and so on.

Have you ever had a boss you actually liked? I haven't. I was never gender-biased about it either. Every female boss I encountered was a bitch and every male boss was a cocksucker. Even if a friend of mine moved up the ladder, I showed no mercy: "Got promoted to office manager!" "Congrats, you're officially a douche bag now. Don't come to Dave and Buster's with us ever again."

Generally speaking, only the worst of the worst reach the top of the heap. And that doesn't mean they do bad work. It means they suck as people. Frank Sinatra? Love his music! Total prick. Barbra Streisand? Terrific actress! Walking nightmare. Harvey Weinstein? Need I say more? Admit it, you still love *Pulp Fiction* and you're not going to throw away your special-edition DVD. Neither am I.

Reaching for the stars means exactly that: focusing on the upward climb, becoming so intoxicated by the alluring stench of your own underarms that you no longer recognize the value, needs, and sometimes rights of the people around you. Globally renowned comedian Louis C.K. (see what I mean?) once likened success to a rocket ship: It takes off and pulls everything around it up into its thrust. That's spot on. Rocket

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY BSWEI

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EVERY INDIVIDUAL NOWADAYS IS A DIAMOND-ENCRUSTED DEWDROP, ROLLING DOWN A PIECE OF GOLDEN ORIGAMI, WITH A HEART THAT'S AN OCEAN AND A SOUL THAT SPANS GALAXIES. I SWEAR, EVEN ON AN EMPTY STOMACH, I COULD PUKE.

ships have zero regard for the earth they scorch—outer space is all that matters. So many of the ambitious and motivated have turned their lives into one giant, perpetual selfie. That's sick. (Incidentally, even if you're not famous or successful, if your Instagram feed consists of nothing but selfies, that's sick, too.)

This culture suffers from a terminal case of selective indulgence. We condemn rich foods for being too caloric. We outlaw trans fats. We denounce capitalistic greed and do our best to send gas-guzzling vehicles the way of the Dodo. But, boy, do we love to celebrate ourselves. Mouths are steadily being stuffed at the buffet of me, where every dish is a special because every customer is special. Every individual nowadays is a diamond-encrusted dewdrop, rolling down a piece of golden origami, with a heart that's an ocean and a soul that spans galaxies. I swear, even on an empty stomach, I could puke.

Look, I'm not saying we're all worthless, I'm just saying we're not that important. None of us is even the center of the internet, let alone the universe. And if you're wholly incapable of not constantly staring at yourself in the mirror, at least take some time to notice the reflection of other people, too. They matter. So do you, incidentally. I don't want you to ditch your dreams and settle for whatever life hands you. Don't be a pig, is all.

So where's the middle ground? It's existing somewhere between the extremes: egomaniacal indulgence on one side and passive defeatism on the other. For me, the compromise is the true pursuit of happiness. I focus on the stuff I actually want versus the stuff I'm told I'm supposed to want. There are a million of life's perks I'd love to obtain (cash, cars, lake houses), but I can fall asleep at night knowing I have the necessities: friends, family, and a roof I don't own, but which still keeps the rain out.

Sometimes it's okay to lay down at the end of a long day, feel pride that you made that Honda Civic payment once again, and relish in the fact that you finally beat *Castlevania III*. Hell, if you have a window in your bedroom, you can even look up at the stars. Just don't be compelled to reach for them, you dick.

Joe DeRosa is an L.A.-based comedian, writer, director, and actor (Better Call Saul and Louie). His multiple stand-up specials and albums can be found online, as well as his podcasts We'll See You in Hell and Emotional Hangs.

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DR. FEELGOOD

I WAS was dating this dude who was weird but hot. One night we were out at a restaurant and he asked me if I'd ever played "doctor" when I was young. I told him I hadn't. He said he hadn't either, but that he occasionally now played it as an adult. I was intrigued enough to want to know more.

"Why don't we just play it tonight," he suggested. "That's the best way to learn."

I told him I was up for trying it. We'd already fucked a few times and the sex was great, so I figured if I didn't like adult "doctor" we could just switch to having our normal hot sex.

When we got to his condo, he told me to wait in the living room. Then he went into his bedroom and came back out wearing scrubs, with a real stethoscope around his neck. His muscled arms looked good in the short sleeves and I could see the outline of his thick cock through his pants. He was holding up a paper gown that was open in the back.

"I'm going to get the examining table ready," he said, handing me the gown. "Put this on."

I told him it didn't look sexy.

"Are you the doctor or the patient?" he asked.

He headed into the kitchen. After putting the gown on, I followed him in there. He'd dimmed the lights and covered his long kitchen table in blankets. I lay down on my back, but he instructed me to roll over.

"We'll start here," he said, and began to massage my neck, shoulders, and lower back with his warm hands. Every once in a while he would murmur "mmmm" or "ah ha."

Next, his hands moved to my ass and squeezed my butt, rubbing it, giving little spankings to each cheek. He trailed his fingers from my asscrack up to my lower back and then all the way down to just behind my pussy, which was getting quite wet. In fact, as he continued the examination, now centered totally on my ass—kneading it, pressing his hands into the flesh—I got so wet I felt myself soaking through the front of the paper gown. I let out a soft moan.

"So far everything looks good," he said. "How are you doing?"

"Fine," I said. "Thank you, doctor."

"Good. Now turn over."

I followed his orders and rolled onto my back. He slid the cool end of the stethoscope over the pulse in my neck, then across my wrists and inner thighs. He combined these movements with licks of his tongue, soft bites.

I MOANED AND WRITHED ON THE EXAM TABLE, LEGS SPREAD WIDE AS HE FINGERED ME FAST AND HARD.

"It looks like you've gotten your gown all wet," he said. "Let's remove it."

He tore the paper gown down the middle, then began to examine my stomach and tits. He checked each nipple with his stethoscope, then licked and sucked on them. He kissed my lower belly, just above my pussy, tonguing around the line of my pubic hair until I was squirming.

"Would you like me to examine your pussy?" he asked.

"Yes, doctor."

He gently parted my pussy lips with one hand, then inserted the middle finger of his other hand into my wet hole and began to massage my cunt.

"Would you prefer it slower or faster?" he asked.

"Faster," I whispered.

He inserted a second finger and began to really fuck me with his hand. I moaned and writhed on the examining table, legs spread wide, as he fingered me fast and hard.

"What I'm going to do next is examine your pussy with my cock," he said.

"Oh yes, doctor, please," I responded with feigned innocence. "I want you to examine my pussy with your cock."

He first put his mouth to my pussy lips, kissing them, then gave a few licks to my clit like a snake. After that he lowered his pants and teased my clit with his rock-hard shaft until I begged him to put it inside me.

He fucked me hard on the blanket-covered table, the stethoscope bouncing off our chests, a steady moan escaping me. It wasn't long before I came on his cock, crying out in pleasure.

After a long blissful moment, I whispered, "Thank you, doctor. I'd like to set up another appointment soon."

—Lara H., Seattle, Washington

EROSBNB

I'VE been renting out my spare bedroom on Airbnb for about a year, and because I live in the center of a touristy area, it's booked most weekends. I usually don't see the people who stay in there because they spend most of their time visiting the sights, and keep to themselves at night. I've never really had anyone be that obnoxious until the Russian couple who stayed with me last weekend.

They were booked for three nights. On the first, they seemed tired from traveling and went to bed early, but the next night they came staggering in, hammered drunk, well past midnight. I had to be at work early the next day, so I was pissed they were being so loud, but assumed they would shut up once they got in their room and passed out.

They had no intention of passing

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THE HARDER HE FUCKED HER, THE DEEPER HE PUSHED HER ONTO MY DICK, UNTIL SHE WAS GAGGING ON IT.

out, though. Fifteen minutes later, I was awakened again to the sound of spanking and screams of pleasure coming from my spare room. If there was any question of what was going on, it quickly vanished when a male voice started narrating everything that was happening in a deep Russian accent, as he talked dirty to her.

I was still annoyed, but once I heard her moaning, I started to get turned-on. I felt like a perv, but couldn't resist wanking it to the sound of strangers fucking in my guest room. The wife was unbelievably loud as she finally came to a screaming climax. I'd never heard a woman make so much noise during sex. It was like her voice was coming through a loudspeaker. I hoped my neighbors wouldn't complain and put a stop to me renting out the spare room.

I wasn't surprised they weren't up the next morning when I left, but around noon I got a text from the husband that said, "Sorry if we kept you up last night. We'll try to keep it down tonight."

I wasn't sure how to respond, so I just wrote, "No problem."

As I went to bed that evening, they still weren't back and I wondered if there would be a repeat performance despite the apology. I was somewhat embarrassed to realize I was disappointed when I heard them quietly come in the front door and sneak past my bedroom to their room.

Half an hour later, as I was still trying to fall asleep, there was a soft knock on my bedroom door. I didn't know how to handle it, so I cracked the door open wearing only my boxers.

They were both standing there in the dark corridor, the husband also in boxers and the wife wearing a sheer



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I WOKE TO THE SOUND OF SPANKING AND SCREAMS OF PLEASURE COMING FROM MY SPARE ROOM.



yellow nightie that did nothing to hide her perky nipples.

"Did you need something?" I asked, a little confused.

"My wife, she is loud when we fuck," the man stated bluntly. "She can't scream with a cock in her mouth, so I thought maybe you could help."

I stared at them for a second, wondering if it was a joke, but they were completely serious. (They were Russian, after all.) I knew I should tell them I wasn't interested, but the bulge in my boxers told another story. I opened the door the rest of the way and gestured to my bed.

There was no foreplay or conversation. The wife simply dropped my boxers to the floor and pushed me down on the bed. I lay back as she got on all fours and started to suck my dick.

Her husband grunted as he thrust into her from behind and fucked her forcefully. I worried for a minute that she wasn't into it, but she was rubbing her clit and I could feel the vibrations of her moans against my cock.

The harder he fucked her, the deeper he pushed her onto my dick, until she was gagging on it, but I could still feel her moaning. She was wild, bobbing her sloppy plump lips all up and down my shaft so deep that her nose squished on my abdomen. Her left hand gripped the base of my cock while her right furiously worked her clit. Then she reached her gripping hand up and spat all over it, smiling up at me before taking me into her mouth again, all without missing a beat. Her breasts swung under her loose yellow nightie

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as she took the pounding from both ends. She was practically gagging on my cock but still working her tongue and lips to create an unbelievable suction.

"I'm gonna come," I eventually said, feeling like I needed to warn them. The husband simply accelerated his pace, pounding into her so hard I could feel her throat squeezing around the head of my dick as I came with a groan. She seemed to be coming, too, but any sounds were silenced as she fought to swallow my load. She couldn't breathe, far less cry out, with my cock that deep in her throat.

The husband must have already finished because he grabbed his boxers to catch the mess as he pulled out of her.

"Thanks," he said over his shoulder, as he led his wife back to their bedroom. She looked back and blew me a kiss.

"My pleasure," I laughed awkwardly.

They were gone when I got up the next morning. I never heard from them again except for the five-star review they posted that said, "Very accommodating host. Thoroughly enjoyed ourselves."

They were the most obnoxious guests I've ever had. But it turned out all right for me.

—Gary F., San Francisco, California

RIDE, SALLY, RIDE

BACK when my friends and I hit the same bar every weekend, there was a regular we called Gap-Tooth Sally. (None of us knew her real name.) Sally was young and pretty attractive from the neck down, but she had a witchy face and a prominent gap between her front teeth that you could easily fit a finger through.

We all joked about Sally because when the hour got late and the bar thinned out, Sally would start pawing one of us, hoping to find someone willing to fuck her. Being young and cruel, we would mock each other and say, "You're going home with Gap-Tooth Sally!" "No, *you're* going home with Gap-Tooth Sally!" and then go back to someone's place to get even more wasted and pass out in front of the TV.

But a man has physical needs and if too much time passes without having these needs met, things can get...*very ugly*.

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SHE PUSHED ME DOWN ON THE BED AND HOPPED ON MY COCK LIKE IT WAS A RIDE AT THE CARNIVAL.

So one Saturday night after too many beers, the bar was closing, my friends were gone, and there was Sally telling me I was cute and rubbing my thigh. *Fuck it,* I thought to myself. *I'm gonna fuck Gap-Tooth Sally.*

Sally lived in an apartment building down the block. She had a roommate, so we crept quietly down a dark hallway into her bedroom. Immediately upon closing her door, Sally pressed me against the wall and started sucking my face and rubbing her crotch against me. Meanwhile, I was already having regrets and contemplating escape—but it was too late. So I gave in, peeling off my clothes and taking off my glasses. Luckily, I'm very nearsighted so without my glasses every face becomes a blur. Now I could be fucking anyone!

"Suck my dick," I ordered, and Sally obediently dropped to her knees and sucked my cock till it was rock-hard and raging to fuck anything.

"I wanna fuck you from behind," I said, and Sally got on the bed on all fours and wiggled her ass at me. This is what doggie-style was made for! She had a big round ass that was perfect for squeezing and I pounded her pussy from behind while she groaned at the top of her lungs. I'm not sure if she actually had an orgasm that night, but every second my dick was in her she howled and writhed like this was the best fucking known to mankind.

I was too drunk to come, and after a while my dick started to droop. But as soon as it fell out between her ass cheeks, Sally was there to suck it back to life. Then she pushed me down on the bed and hopped on my cock like it was a ride at the carnival. She fucked me so hard it felt like my dick might break off, while I pulled her full tits out of her red bra and kneaded them. I tried hard not to smile as I thought of my friends and how they were all going to lose their shit when I told them who I'd gone home with.

Once again I lost my hard-on, so I stopped fucking and squinted in the direction of my clothes, thinking I should just get dressed and get the hell out of there. But Sally refused to let me leave without coming.

She put my sleepy whiskey dick back in her mouth and sucked and tugged and jerked, tickling my balls and groaning as if my cock was the most delicious thing she'd ever tasted.

When I finally told her I didn't think I could come, she said, "I love a challenge," and pushed me back down. This time, she started slowly, running her tongue hard and wide from the base to the head. As I grew, she increased her speed, stopping every few seconds to let a giant trail of spit dangle from her mouth to my cock as she jerked it with perfect pressure. I got into it, grabbing her head and pushing my cock deep down her throat.

Sally moaned and worked harder, faster, while her hand followed her mouth all over my cock. Suddenly, I shot a massive load down her throat that shook my whole body and left me paralyzed. Sally gobbled it all to the last drop. She was still blurry, but I could vaguely make out her gap-tooth smile.

—Barry B., Tucson, Arizona

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I laid her on her back and expressed strokes of oral fondness to her sweet shaven flower which she seemed to be enjoyably sensitive to. I softly licked and gently sucked the magic emanating from her smooth flowery pedals and applied both simultaneously to budding style until she wriggled away.



★★★★★



★★★★★

★★★★★



After sipping some champaign, she retreated to the bathroom to change into an exceptionally hot lingerie outfit. Holy mackerel, this young thing oozed sexuality.

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